

Liberation

DECEMBER 2022

CENTRAL ORGAN OF CPI(ML)

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**LATIN AMERICA
AND THE CARIBBEAN**

**LEFT
RESURGENCE,
FAR RIGHT
THREATS**

KARNATAKA SANITATION WORKERS DEMAND PERMANENT EMPLOYMENT

A state-level conference of sanitation workers (powrakarmikas) was held on 06.11.2022 at Ambedkar Bhavan in Bangalore by the BBMP Pourakarmika Sangha, Karnataka Pragathi Para Pourakarmika Sangha, Karnataka Pragathi Para Tajya Sagisuva Vahana Chalakara Matthu Sahayakara Sangha (all affiliated with AICCTU), demanding that all powrakarmikas in the state be made permanent. Thousands of powrakarmikas participated in this convention.

In the conference, the President of the BBMP Powrakarmika Sangha, Com. Nirmala said that an indefinite protest was organised in July, 2022, demanding permanent employment and other basic facilities for all the powrakarmikas of the state. At that time, the Chief Minister of the State had promised in writing to make permanent the powrakarmikas working in all the local bodies across the State and had also constituted a committee for the same.

But before the report of the committee could be finalised, the government announced that only 11,000 powrakarmikas will be recruited across the state, whereas there are more than 48,000 powrakarmikas are presently working. Thus, she demanded that all the powrakarmikas should be made permanent immediately. She said that they are holding this state-level conference to send a warning to the government that they will launch a massive struggle for the permanent status of the powrakarmikas in the coming days.

Com. Ratnamma, the general secretary of the Union, said that the workers will not rest until the powrakarmikas are made permanent, and called upon the powrakarmikas to gherao the Vidhana Soudha, if necessary.

Com. Keshav Nayak, general secretary of the SWM auto-drivers and helpers union, demanded that the government

immediately treat all drivers and helpers as powrakarmikas. "In all the urban local bodies of the state, even today, vehicle drivers and helpers are employed under the sham contract system and are not provided with any service facilities as required by law," he said and added that due to this, these workers are facing severe hardships.

AICCTU State President Clifton D'Rozario said that for centuries now, the society has thrust brooms into the hands of Dalits to ensure they only sweep garbage. "The government is hell-bent upon continuing this caste-based profession. We should not allow it and we need to be careful that the children of our powrakarmikas do not sweep roads and collect garbage. And for that, the government must provide free education to all the children of powrakarmikas," he said.

Several powrakarmikas who participated in the convention spoke and shared the hardships they were facing and vowed to gear up for a massive struggle to make their jobs permanent. ■



The winter cold has begun in Nagpur already. My muscles in legs, hands, stomach and chest are getting spasms and severe pains. I'm not able to bear the pain as I've become much weaker after two attacks of Covid-19 and one of swine flu."

"No one is interested in providing emergency medical treatment for my cyst in kidneys, cyst in the brain, and rheumatic pains. Though the doctors at GMCH (Government Medical College Hospital) wrote for the immediate requirement to treat these and other fatal ailments,"

- G.N. Saibaba in a short letter written after the SC suspended his release.

Lodged in the Nagpur central jail since 7 March 2017, 56-year-old political prisoner Saibaba is 90% physically disabled and seriously unwell, suffering from hypertrophic cardiomyopathy with left ventricular dysfunction, a cyst in his brain, kidney stones, pancreatic problems, and acute cervical spondylitis, among other ailments.

RELEASE OF PROF. G.N. SAIBABA SUSPENDED

While the acquittal of GN Saibaba, Mahesh Kariman Tirki, Hem Keshavdatta Mishra, Prashant Sanglikar and Vijay Tirki, by the Bombay High Court was a victory for the battle for the release of all political prisoners, the same was short-lived as the Supreme Court in a special sitting held on a Saturday morning, suspended the said order and stayed their release. After being incarcerated for 6 years, Prof G.N. Saibaba the others were acquitted by the Bombay High Court in its order delivered on 13th October 2022.

Sadly, Pandu Narote died during the pendency of the appeal. Prof. G. N. Saibaba, who is in a wheelchair with a 90% physical disability also suffers from a serious heart condition, acute pancreatitis and gall bladder stones and is in need of immediate medical attention. A request for house arrest was also rejected. In the Press Conference held in Delhi on 'India Behind Bars', Vasantha, activist and partner of GN Saibaba had said, "Saibaba has been battling various health issues for so many years. This government has no basic sense of responsibility and empathy towards its own citizens."

The manner in which the present regime has weaponised an already unjust criminal justice system to lock up anyone standing up against its unjust policies is clear in its use of the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act.

CPIML will continue to fight for the release of all political prisoners and the repeal of all draconian laws. ■



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30 YRS OF DEMOLITION OF BABRI MASJID: SANGH BRIGADE'S ESCALATING WAR ON INDIA'S DIVERSE CULTURE AND SECULAR DEMOCRACY



Photo by PABLO BARTHOLOMEW

December 6, 2022 will mark the completion of three decades since the demolition of the Babri Masjid. The time bomb that was planted in the wake of India's independence, with the surreptitious installation of idols at the mosque on the night of 22-23 December 1949, exploded in broad daylight on 6 December 1992 afternoon, when a mob pulled down the mosque in the cheering presence of top BJP leaders. If future historians ever seek to identify a specific moment to trace the rise of communal fascism in today's India, the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 will undeniably be that moment. India has changed dramatically since that demolition. With every passing day we are now realising ever more acutely that the Ayodhya campaign of the Sangh-BJP camp was not about demolition of one 16th century mosque or the construction of a grand temple in what is believed to be the mythological birthplace of Ram, it was about changing the very idea of India and the constitutional framework of the Indian Republic.

The dominant idea before and even after the demolition of the mosque was to find a negotiated settlement of the Ayodhya dispute or go by the verdict of the judiciary. The BJP then refused to accept the idea of a court verdict

arguing that a matter of 'faith' cannot be subjected to legal jurisdiction. It is not difficult to understand that the act of demolition actually followed from this premise, it was very much a planned conspiratorial act to change the circumstances of the dispute. More than a quarter century later, with the BJP ensconced in power at the Centre, the Supreme Court effectively validated the post-demolition circumstances by awarding the ownership of the 'disputed land' to the very people who had demolished the mosque even after terming the act of demolition as an egregious violation of law. While the demolishers got what they wanted, the seekers of justice got a 'compensatory' offer of a separate plot of five acres for the construction of a mosque. Nearly three years later, the apex court closed all cases arising from the demolition by declaring that the issue had ceased to survive!

Outside of the judiciary many in civil society had also hoped that the handing over of the disputed land for a temple would bring about a cordial end to the dispute and pave the way for communal harmony and reconciliation. The Act passed by Parliament in 1991 had also made a special exemption for Ayodhya while declaring all other places of worship to be unchangeable from whatever character they had at the time of attainment of independence. The Sangh brigade however made no secret of its future gameplan – for them Kashi and Mathura, to name just two more places, were just waiting to follow the Ayodhya template. With the Ram Mandir all set for inauguration just before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, we can see a simultaneous intensification of the battle for Kashi and Mathura. Following the Ayodhya template, the Sangh has again employed a two-pronged strategy combining litigations with aggressive communal mobilisation on the ground.

To create a legal space for mounting more assaults on mosques for conversion into temples, the BJP

“

The calamity Ambedkar had warned against is staring us in the face, the challenge is to rescue India from the ravages of this disaster and strengthen democracy by all possible means to stop the Hindutva bulldozer.

has challenged the legal validity of the 1991 Places of Worship Act itself. With the Supreme Court asking for the Modi government's response on the subject, the future of the Act, which was upheld by the Supreme Court even in the course of its 2019 Ayodhya judgement, is anybody's guess. Like Kashi and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, the Sangh brigade has also targeted the Jamia Masjid in Srirangapatna near Mysore which was the historic site of Tipu Sultan's war with the East India Company in 1799. Several well-known Mughal and pre-Mughal monuments associated with Muslim rulers, including world famous heritage centres like the Taj Mahal and Qutab Minar, are today being targeted by the Sangh brigade as it seeks to rewrite history and paint the whole of India with a saffron brush.

The trajectory of the Ayodhya dispute has clearly taught us that there can be no reconciliation with the cultural aggression of the Sangh brigade. The BJP wants to take us back to a mythical past of Ramayana and Mahabharata, it

wants to bulldoze India's historical and cultural diversity into a saffron monolith cherished by the RSS. It wants to purge India of every Islamic sign, from history and architecture to everyday culture and cuisine. The so-called cultural nationalism propagated by the RSS is nothing but imposition of RSS-style Hindutva or Hindu supremacy which will however not stop at marginalising everything Muslim, it will go the whole hog to impose the Brahmanical and patriarchal order enunciated in the Manusmriti, which the RSS had advocated as India's original and authentic constitution. This RSS quest for Manusmriti-inspired uniformity is a total war on India's diversity, and on the continental-scale collage that is India beyond the imaginary straitjacket of Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan.

December 6, 2022 also marks the 66th death anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the chairman of the drafting committee of India's Constitution and the first Law and Justice Minister of independent India. With prophetic foresight Ambedkar had warned: "If Hindu Raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country". Two months before his death, Ambedkar had renounced Hinduism and embraced Buddhism with half a million of his followers. He did that in Nagpur, the headquarters of the RSS, on Ashoka Vijayadashami, the day Ashoka the Great had renounced war and violence and turned to Buddhism for peace and equality, the very day the RSS chose as its foundation day and celebrates by worshipping weapons and violence. Today the BJP seeks to curb the very right provided in the Constitution to follow a religion of one's choice. The calamity Ambedkar had warned against is staring us in the face, the challenge is to rescue India from the ravages of this disaster and strengthen democracy by all possible means to stop the Hindutva bulldozer. ■

THE DISTURBING GROWTH OF HINDUTVA FORCES IN TAMIL NADU

▲ Shankar V

On the face of it, Tamil Nadu is one of the weakest states for the BJP from where the party has no representation in Lok Sabha and only four members in the State Assembly. Because of the deep roots of the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu and the powerful influence of progressive social values, it is often thought that the soil of Tamil Nadu is impenetrable for the BJP and its regressive social outlook and Hindi-dominated Hindutva ideology. But it will be a major mistake to ignore the BJP's growing political presence and ideological influence in Tamil Nadu. Riding on the back of a faction-ridden AIADMK and various other anti-DMK parties in Tamil Nadu, the saffron camp is quietly but steadily gaining ground in the state.

Apart from trying various permutations and combinations at the level of political alliances, the Sangh's current focus is on gaining legitimacy and changing the ideological environment of the Tamil society. To this end, they are trying to appropriate a whole range of Tamil icons including VOC (V.O. Chidambaranar, a Congress stalwart who developed differences with Gandhi) and the great writer and freedom fighter Subramania Bharathiyar. The Sangh however has a big problem with Periyar and his progressive legacy which popularised rationalism against religious obscurantism, and upheld social justice against Brahminism and women's rights against the patriarchal prescriptions and regimentation of Manusmiriti. Tamil Nadu was the first state to reject caste surnames as part of a big mass movement when feudal values were otherwise very strong and stubborn.

Over the years the intensity of the movement for social justice and rationalism has been waning and the RSS wants to take full advantage

of this situation to intervene with its counter narrative. It is trying to promote Ganesh Puja and other such festivals, capture and use temple committees to serve its agenda, and project ancient Tamil deity Murugan as the rallying emotive icon as Ram in North India. This ideological counter-narrative coupled with aggressive social engineering and political alliance-making seems to be the RSS formula for the growth of Hindutva politics in Tamil Nadu. The RSS wanted to take out marches across Tamil Nadu on Gandhi Jayanti, and after the state government denied permission citing intelligence reports about possible law and order disturbance, the High Court then directed the state to permit RSS rallies on 6 November. The administration permitted rallies in three locations in three districts where RSS presence is not so strong, denied rallies in 24 places and allowed indoor rallies in 23 locations. The court also stipulated harsher conditions including prohibition of carrying lathis, responsibility for any damage of public property, etc. Frustrated with the conditions, RSS has now gone to the Supreme Court for relief while holding rallies in three locations on 6 November which was not so impressive, according to RSS standards.

The opposition political climate is also somewhat favourable to the BJP today. The AIADMK is deeply immersed in internal squabbles between two former CMs, EPS and OPS. As a result, many AIADMK leaders are flocking to the BJP fold hoping for proper accommodation. With support from sections of the media, the BJP is trying to play the role of a visible opposition force in Tamil Nadu. The PMK too is sticking to the BJP-AIADMK camp hoping for a better future. Despite winning some MLAs in alliance with the DMK, the

Congress is a divided house without any powerful state leadership. Against such a backdrop, the RSS-BJP is aiming at winning over the social base of the Congress in Tamil Nadu. The RSS attempt to hold rallies at 52 locations all over the state on the day of Gandhi Jayanthi, in the name of celebrating Gandhi, was also a ploy to make forays into the Congress' upper caste, Brahmin and non-Brahmin, base.

In the course of its efforts for decades, the Sangh-BJP has gained influence among the elite section of one sub sect of Dalits, called "Mallars" (formerly Pallars) who are numerically significant in southern Tamil Nadu. In fact, they were successful in making some Dalit organisations reject reservation for the said caste citing their presumed princely past. In fact, the Modi government and the former AIADMK state government facilitated the process by granting legal recognition, while cleverly not removing from the list of Scheduled Castes, to some seven Dalit castes, clubbing them under the category of "Devendrakula Velalar", identifying with the god Indra and claiming descent from Kshatriyas. The Sangh also has a significant foothold among the Tamil trading (merchant) community called "Nadars" in Kanyakumari district. With the help of AIADMK, the Sangh-BJP camp is also gaining influence among a dominant OBC caste called "Goundars", the caste of former AIADMK CM Edappadi Palanisamy. The BJP selectively uses the tool of central MSME loans to cement its influence among emerging entrepreneurs in both rural and urban areas of western Tamil Nadu. Its systematic effort to gain influence among the scavenging caste in the region, Arundathiyars, has also paid some dividends while a lot is yet to be done by the party in western Tamil

Nadu. Making L Murugan, the former BJP state president, a current Minister of State in the Modi cabinet is also aimed at winning over the same caste.

The Modi government is so using centralisation of power as a tool to weaken the federal framework and increase the BJP's intervention and influence in Tamil Nadu. From assault on fiscal federalism through GST to the undermining of cultural and linguistic federalism through measures like NEET and the National Education Policy 2020, the BJP is relentlessly working on these lines. The deployment of central officials is also being heavily politicised to plant loyal pro-RSS officials in the state and recall upright officials on central assignments outside of the state. The Governor too is acting as an agent of the BJP government at the centre, withholding constitutional approvals while promoting Sanskrit and various regressive Hindutva ideas.

The DMK government is quite active on the agenda of defending federalism, but it keeps competing with the BJP in the sphere of corporate appeasement. There are also signs of Hindu appeasement as is the case now with many opposition parties. For example, it is busy evicting

tenants in the name of removing encroachments on temple lands. The drive against encroachment is also directed against slums of the poor and the powerless while the rich and the powerful are allowed to escape in various ways. We also find saffronised police administration in districts like Coimbatore and Nagercoil where progressive people were detained for criticising Godse on the Gandhi memorial day. It is common knowledge that attacks against Dalits are also on the rise in recent period. The DMK state government that passed resolution against three farm laws is not willing to pass a similar resolution against Labour Codes in the assembly.

The DMK of course seeks to balance its pro-corporate model by mixing an element of welfarism. But it wants to use this welfarism as an insurance against its agenda of privatisation and other pro-corporate measures. The DMK propagates its economic approach of combining neoliberalism and welfarism as the Dravidian model in economics, linking it up with its political narrative that highlights self-respect, social justice, federalism and more power to the states. It remains committed to the policy of 69 percent reservation and is trying to counter

the national Education Policy with its own education policy and defend linguistic and cultural diversity against the BJP's attempt to impose Sanskrit and Hindi. In an overall sense, the DMK fares much better than most regional and other opposition parties in resisting the Modi government and its fascist offensive and aggressive Hindutva agenda.

Parties like the Viduthalai Chiruthaikal Katchi (VCK or Liberation Panthers Party) led by Tholkappiyar Thirumavalavan, CPI and CPI(M), which contested the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections as part of the DMK-led coalition, are not part of the State Government. There is a need to step up the independent role of the Left and progressive camp against the BJP's fascist agenda and also to hold the DMK government accountable for fulfilling its election promises and responding to the needs and aspirations of the working people. CPI(ML) is expanding its organisation and initiatives on various fronts in this direction and seeks to enlist the cooperation of the VCK, CPI and CPI(M) as well as various Ambedkarite and Periyarist streams and other democratic forces and struggles. ■

EWS JUDGMENT: BOWING DOWN TO THE EXECUTIVE AN ADM JABALPUR WITH NO KHANNA

▲ Clifton D'Rozario

The EWS judgment invokes memories of one of the most shameful moments in Supreme Court history where it capitulated to the executive. During Emergency, the Supreme Court passed its infamous judgment, commonly known as the ADM Jabalpur case, where it eliminated the rule of law by upholding the suspension of fundamental rights during Emergency. Notable though was the dissenting judgement of Justice H.R. Khanna

who observed that “*detention without trial is an anathema to all those to love personal liberty*”. Justice Khanna's conviction came at a cost. He was superseded and his junior colleague Justice M .H. Beg was appointed Chief Justice of India by the then Indira Gandhi government in 1977. He resigned in protest. Incidentally, in 2017, the Supreme Court passed the Right to Privacy judgment where it upheld Justice Khanna's dissent holding that: “...*The view taken by*

Justice Khanna must be accepted, and accepted in reverence for the strength of its thoughts and the courage of its convictions.”

Justice Khanna's dissent stands testimony to the possibility of judicial independence even in the face of authoritarian regimes. In the EWS case, no doubt there is a dissent, but it is not in the league of the Khanna dissent.

The EWS judgment where a

Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court upheld the 103rd amendment¹ to the Constitution, by a 3:2 majority², enabling the State to provide for a maximum of 10% reservation for “the economically weaker sections” of citizens other than Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes, is nothing short of a travesty of justice. The Court rejected the arguments that reservation in education and employment on the basis of economic criteria is impermissible and offends the basic structure of the Constitution; that the exclusion of socially and educationally backward classes i.e. Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs is discriminatory; that providing for 10% additional reservation breaches the 50% ceiling of reservations already settled by the decisions of the Supreme Court; and that the amendment amounts to an abrogation of the Equality Code.

Recall that the 103rd amendment was brought in just few months before the 2019 parliamentary elections as the Modi government desperately sought to deflect from its abysmal failure to deliver on promises of “development” and “employment”. The amendment nullifies the very idea of reservations, which are constitutionally mandated on the basis of social and educational backwardness to historically oppressed communities. The Modi Government’s move was a fundamentally dishonest one with the underlying purpose of dismantling of the caste-based reservations mandated by the Constitution. By upholding the amendment, the Supreme Court has given its seal of approval on the blatant fraud played on the Constitution.

Undermining the fundamental rationale for reservations as the

first step towards dismantling caste-based reservations:

Perhaps one of the biggest disservice that the Supreme Court has done in upholding EWS reservations is to undermine the fundamental rationale underlying reservations i.e. ensuring the representation of historically oppressed and marginalised communities in public life, be it educational institutions or government jobs.

The jurisprudence around reservations evolved over the past decades confirms it to be a policy of affirmative action aimed at ending the monopoly of dominant communities and ensuring equality of opportunity to the marginalised sections. Reservations were not contemplated to be a programme for poverty alleviation or even annihilation of caste, but as constitutionally mandating the right of representation in public life. It is for this purpose that social and educational backwardness and inadequacy in representation have been held to be the bedrock for grant of reservations.

In the EWS judgment, the majority opinion has held³ that reservation cannot be regarded as an essential feature of the Constitution that cannot be modulated. It further held⁴ that it is an instrument not only for inclusion of socially and educationally backward classes in the mainstream of society but, also for inclusion of any class or section so disadvantaged as to be answering the description of a weaker section. The dissenting opinion, while accepting that insertion of the ‘economic criteria’ for affirmative action *per se* is not unconstitutional, held the amendment to be unconstitutional since it excluded Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs.

Thus, both the majority and minority judgments, have diluted the constitutional mandate of reservations being a reparative policy for historically oppressed communities. The Supreme Court has given its imprimatur to EWS reservations which puts on equal footing the historically oppressed communities with the very communities responsible for their discrimination and persecution. This is the fraud played on the Constitution.

This has to be seen in conjunction with the observations in the concurring judgments of two judges who form part of the majority. Justice Bela M. Trivedi and Justice J.B. Pardiwala, while upholding economic status-based reservations have thought it fit to comment on caste-based reservations. Justice Bela M. Trivedi states that⁵: “... *It cannot be gainsaid that the age-old caste system in India was responsible for the origination of the reservation system in the country. It was introduced to correct the historical injustice faced by the persons belonging to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and other backward classes, and to provide them a level playing field to compete with the persons belonging to the forward classes. However, at the end of seventy-five years of our independence, we need to revisit the system of reservation in the larger interest of the society as a whole, as a step forward towards transformative constitutionalism.*” Justice J.B. Pardiwala states that⁶: “*The new concept of economic criteria introduced by the impugned amendment for affirmative action may go a long way in eradicating caste-based reservation. It may be perceived as a first step in the process of doing away with caste-based reservation...*” and he goes on to

[1] *Vide the amendment clause (6) and Explanation was added to Article 15 and clause (6) was added to Article 16. The amendment came into effect on 14.01.2019.*

[2] *Jst, Dinesh Maheshwari, Jst. Bela Trivedi and Jst. Pardiwala upheld the amendment, while Jst. Ravindra Bhat and Chief Justice UU Lalit dissented.*

[3] *para 56 of majority judgement by Jst. Dinesh Maheshwari*

[4] *Id at para 102(a)*

[5] *para 28 of concurring judgment by Jst. Bela Trivedi*

[6] *para 187 of concurring judgment by Jst Pardiwala*

add that⁷ “...Reservation should not continue for an indefinite period of time so as to become a vested interest.”

Justice J B Pardiwala has erroneously claimed that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar wanted caste-based reservations to continue only for 10 years,⁸: “...The idea of Baba Saheb Ambedkar was to bring social harmony by introducing reservation for only 10 years. However, it has continued for the past 7 decades...” In reality, the ten-year period for caste-based reservations was a compromise arrived at in the Constituent Assembly, with which Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was dissatisfied and suggested making use of constitutional amendments to keep extending these provisions.⁹ Moreover, this time-limit to caste-based reservations is only in relation to political caste-based reservations and not to education and jobs.

These observations are divorced from reality. Despite decades of reservations, a look at existing data on representation of various social categories paints a dismal picture, reinforcing the need for continued reservations for SCs/STs/OBCs. Jitendra Singh, Minister of State for Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions, informed Parliament in March this year that in 43 departments and government offices including Cabinet Secretariat, UPSC and Election Commission (but excluding the largest central government employers such as Railways and Department of Posts), the total number of Group A to Group C employees (including safaikarmacharis) works out to 5.12 lakh. Of these, 17.70% are SC, 6.72% ST and 20.26% OBC. In Group-A, the highest tier among these, the representation of SCs is just 12.86%, of STs 5.64% and of OBCs

16.88%.¹⁰ This is not the case only with government jobs. A 2015 article examines the social composition i.e. share of different castes and communities, in positions of power and influence of public institutions in Allahabad namely the Press Club, University faculty, Bar Association, police, and commanding positions in trade unions, NGOs, media houses, and has found that these are heavily dominated by upper castes in general, and Brahmins and Kayasthas in particular, while disadvantaged castes, for their part, are largely relegated to subordinate or menial positions.¹¹ With the shift in the centre of gravity of job market towards private sector and IT sector in particular, upper caste students occupy dominant position in such a job market with their historical advantage of education, capital and caste networks. In sectors where there is no reservation including the judiciary, one sees domination of forward castes.

The observations on caste-based reservations offer a window of opportunity to the present regime to initiate the process of altogether doing away with caste-based reservations. This would be in line with the consistent efforts of the RSS to delegitimise caste-based reservations. Speaking at the Jaipur Literature Festival in January 2017, RSS ideologue Manmohan Vaidya said reservation is not required in India as it promotes separatism and friction in society.¹² In contrast, more recently, RSS joint general secretary, Dattatreya Hosabale said that reservations are required because there is a social and economic disparity in society.¹³ Then again, a month prior to Dattatreya Hosabale's statement, in August 2021, RSS sarsanghchalak, Mohan

Bhagwat called for a “harmonious conversation” between those in favour of reservations and those against it.¹⁴ These contradictory positions are part of RSS's deliberate effort to popularise an alternate discourse on reservations, intended to abolish caste-based reservations.

ECONOMIC CRITERIA – UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND OBLIVIOUS OF REALITY

All 5 judges of this Constitutional Bench have unanimously held that economic-based reservations are legal and valid. The point of disagreement was on the question of exclusion of Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs from EWS reservations, which the majority opinion upheld.

The Court also brushed aside the law laid down by the 9-Judge bench in Indra Sawhney, and several other judgments, that economic criteria cannot be the sole basis to grant reservation, by holding that to avail the benefit of caste-based reservations, the class concerned ought to be carrying some other disadvantage too and not the economic disadvantage alone. To reiterate, reservation is for participation and representation and not a poverty alleviation programme. Economic upliftment and elimination of poverty is a goal for the State to strive for as per Directive Principles of State Policy but, reservation is not a way to alleviate poverty. If that were the case, decades of reservation ought to have lifted its beneficiaries, particularly Dalits and Adivasis and OBCs, from poverty. As pointed above, despite the decades of reservations, the conditions of these oppressed communities continue to be dismal.

Moreover, within the Constitutional frame, nothing stops the State from

[7] *Id at para 190*

[8] *Supra note 6 at para 191*

[9] <https://theswaddle.com/ambedkar-didnt-endorse-a-time-limit-for-caste-based-why-did-a-supreme-court-judge-claim-he-did/>

[10] <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/scs-sts-obcs-in-central-govt-what-data-on-posts-and-vacancies-show-7881047/>

[11] “Caste and the Power Elite in Allahabad”, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2015/6/special-articles/caste-and-power-elite-allahabad.html>

[12] <http://www.india.com/news/india/rss-against-reservation-says-it-promotes-separatism-in-india-1772113/>

[13] <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/reservations-should-continue-as-long-as-inequality-exists-in-society-rss-general-secretary-dattatreya-hosabale/articleshow/85210591.cms>

[14] <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/india-news-rss-chief-mohan-bhagwat-pitches-for-harmonious-conversation-on-reservation/336597>

directing its policy towards ensuring that there is no concentration of wealth (Article 39(c)), from enacting a law providing the right to work (Article 41) or pass an enactment mandating living wages for workers (Article 43) and securing their participation in the managements of industries (Article 43-A).

The Supreme Court failed to consider these aspects as also the fact that economic status is transient in nature, unlike social backwardness, which is historical, resulting from caste practices and oppressions.

By upholding the amendment, the Supreme Court also joined in the mockery made of the immense poverty of oppressed communities caused by the historical injustice of caste. Judicial notice was taken of Office Memorandum F. No. 20013/01/2018-BC-II dated January 17, 2019, issued by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, Government of India which stipulated that only persons whose families have a gross annual income less than Rs. 8 lakhs, or agricultural land less than 5 acres, or residential flat less than 1,000 sq. ft., or residential plot less than 100 sq. yards in the notified Municipalities, or residential plot less than 200 sq. yards in the areas other than the notified Municipalities, are to be identified as EWS for the benefit of reservation.¹⁵

To put this in perspective, one can look at poverty lines fixed for access to basic rights, such as access to food through ration cards, access to medical services through government hospitals, where the recent rural and urban all-India poverty lines are Rs. 972/- and Rs. 1407/- respectively. Further the Report¹⁶ of the Expert Committee on Determining the Methodology for Fixing the National

Minimum Wage, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India dated January 2019 has recommended that the national minimum wage ought to be Rs. 375 (at July 2018 prices). This works out to Rs. 9,750 per month for all wage workers, irrespective of sectors, skills, occupations and the rural-urban location. Incidentally the recent report “The State of Inequality in India” by the Institute for Competitiveness, brought out in response to the request of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (EAC-PM) has found that an Indian earning a monthly wage of Rs 25,000/- is among the top 10 per cent of earners in the country.¹⁷ In this scenario fixing an eligibility limit of Rs. 8 lakhs i.e. Rs. 67,000/- monthly income, for EWS makes a mockery of the reality of poverty in the country.

UNCONSTITUTIONAL AND UNCONSCIONABLE EXCLUSION OF SCs, STs AND OBCs

The majority judgment has brushed aside the explicit exclusion of Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs from EWS reservations on the ground that they are already enjoying the benefit of affirmative action in their favour by way of reservations in educational institutions and public employment, seats in Legislature, etc. This is despite the fact that they are also economically backward in addition to being socially and educationally backward. Indeed, the inclusion of forward class and exclusion of disadvantaged class from the protection and benefit of reservation violate the basic structure of the Constitution. The majority judgment has held as follows¹⁸: “... Suffice it to observe that the amendment in question is essentially related to the requirements of those economically weaker sections who have hitherto not been given the benefit of such

an affirmative action (particularly of reservation), which was accorded to the other class/classes of citizens namely, the SEBCs/OBCs/SCs/STs. Viewing this affirmative action of EWS reservation from the standpoint of backward class versus forward class is not in accord with the very permissibility of compensatory discrimination towards the goal of real and substantive justice for all.” In fact the majority judgment has held that¹⁹: “... this exclusion is inevitable for the true operation and effect of the scheme of EWS reservation...”

This the minority judgment has disagreed with in strong words holding that²⁰: “...this court has for the first time, in the seven decades of the republic, sanctioned an avowedly exclusionary and discriminatory principle. Our Constitution does not speak the language of exclusion. In my considered opinion, the amendment, by the language of exclusion, undermines the fabric of social justice, and thereby, the basic structure.”

The majority judgment upheld EWS reservation to the exclusion of SCs/STs/OBCs without a basic understanding of who the poor in this country are, and ignoring the fact that social backwardness was a “cause” of economic backwardness and not its “consequence”. Income and wealth distribution, mirrors caste hierarchy. The poor are predominantly from the SC/ST/OBC communities, while dominant castes are the majority in higher social classes.

Caste and class, according to Babasaheb Ambedkar, are next door neighbours, and it is only a span that separates the two. He concluded that a caste is an enclosed class.²¹ He also stated that²²: “One striking feature of the caste system is that the different

[15] *Supra* note 6 at para 74

[16] https://labour.gov.in/sites/default/files/Committee_on_Determination_of_Methodology.pdf

[17] <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1826325>

[18] *Supra* note 3 at para 75

[19] *Supra* note 3 at para 77.2

[20] Para 1 of minority judgment by Jst. Ravindra Bhat

[21] “Castes in India”, at pg 15, https://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_01.pdf

[22] “Philosophy of Hinduism” at page 47, http://www.mea.gov.in/Images/attach/amb/Volume_03.pdf

castes do not stand as a horizontal series all on the same plane. It is a system in which the different castes are placed in a vertical series one above the other” i.e. “the principle of gradation and rank”, which regulates inter-generational entitlements to basic social and economic rights. Thus, economic status largely follows caste hierarchy.

A study²³ on income and wealth disparity in India is revealing in this regard:

- The population share of SCs/STs/OBCs in the top decile of wealth and consumption is lower than their overall population share.
- Average annual household income in India was Rs 1,13,222/-. Among dominant caste groups, Brahmins earned 48% above the national average while non-Brahmin dominant caste earned 45%. On the other hand, STs and SCs earned 34% and 21% less than the national average respectively. OBC groups earned 8% less than the national average.
- In matters of wealth ownership: 50% of the Brahmin, 31% of Rajputs, 44% of Bania and 57% of Kayasth fall in richest category. For other caste groups, only 5% ST, 10% SC and 16% OBC fall in richest category.

Another study²⁴ concluded that of the total national assets, 41% is owned by upper caste Hindus, 31% by OBCs, 7.6% by SCs and 3.7% by STs.

The abovementioned study²⁵ finds that the population share of SCs/STs/OBCs in the top decile of wealth and consumption has deteriorated over the last 40 years. Upward class mobility is also a factor of caste. This is the

Indian form of inequality, originating in the social structure of caste and exacerbated by neoliberal economic policies. As Anand Teltumbde²⁶ puts it, “Neoliberalism ostensibly came in the form of an economic theory that upheld a free market paradigm, but in reality it was an ideology akin to Spencer’s Social Darwinism”. That is to say, caste – rooted in hierarchy, notions of purity and supremacy – finds a willing partner in neoliberal policies, which itself is rooted in the notion of “survival of the fittest”.

Indeed, the Court, in its majority judgement, has ignored the glaring statistics brought to its attention. Relying on official reports, it was argued²⁷ that the EWS population among forward castes would be around 5%, and providing 10% of reservation for such a small population is manifestly arbitrary and fraud on the Constitution. For instance in Karnataka²⁸, only five communities — Brahmin, Jain, Aryavaishya, Nagarhas and Modaliars — that make up an estimated 4% of the State’s population, are outside the existing reservation matrix, and those who meet the criteria for EWS amongst them, which will be a miniscule percentage will now enjoy 10% reservation!

CONCLUSION

The Supreme Court role upholding in EWS reservations has to be seen in the broader context of the judiciary shielding the executive, and rarely interfering with the ruling regime’s policies. In the Modi era, there is the executive’s open interference in the appointment of judges, accompanied by the Court’s failure to perform its constitutional role as a check on

governmental excesses. The court has been reluctant to counter the political interests of the ruling party evident from the verdicts in politically charged cases including Sahara-Birla, Loya, Bhima-Koregaon, Rafale, Aadhaar, Kashmir Habeas Corpus matters, Ayodhya, Sai Baba etc. and the deliberate delay in taking up so-called contentious cases challenging their political agenda including CAA, abrogation of Article 370, demonetisation, electoral bonds, etc. It is apparent that constituents of the judiciary have a political consensus with the ruling regime, also perhaps in deference to the overwhelming electoral mandate the present regime enjoys. Yet, as a legal scholar puts it: “...it has acted as a cheerleader for the Modi government’s agenda. Not only has it abdicated its supposed counter-democratic function as a shield for citizens against state lawlessness, but it has also actually acted as a powerful sword that can be wielded at the behest of the executive.”²⁹

About four decades ago, a judge of the Gujarat High Court, Justice A.P. Ravani, while dealing with a challenge³⁰ to a trial court order directing eviction of certain hutments, made an interesting observation that the authorities and judges psychologically “represent only the class interest to which they belonged”. Unfortunately the EWS judgment confirms the trend of the judiciary betraying their own social prejudices and political beliefs. ■

[23] “Wealth Inequality, Class and Caste in India, 1961 – 2021”, <https://wid.world/document/n-k-bharti-wealth-inequality-class-and-caste-in-india-1961-2012/>

[24] ‘Wealth Ownership and Inequality in India: A Socio-religious Analysis’, published in 2018, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2394481118808107?journalCode=sisa>

[25] “Wealth Inequality, Class and Caste in India, 1961 – 2021”, published in 2018, <https://wid.world/document/n-k-bharti-wealth-inequality-class-and-caste-in-india-1961-2012/>

[26] “Victimhood of Dalits”, https://www.india-seminar.com/2020/727/727_anand_teltumbde.htm

[27] Arguments noted at paras 10.2 and 16.2 of the majority judgment by Jst. Dinesh Maheshwari

[28] <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/in-karnataka-five-communities-with-4-population-will-fall-under-ews-quota/article66111568.ece>

[29] <https://scroll.in/article/979818/the-crisis-of-legitimacy-plaguing-the-supreme-court-in-modi-era-is-now-hidden-in-plain-sight>

[30] *Surat Municipal Corporation v. Rameshchandra* [AIR 1986 Guj 50]

DEMONETISATION: SIX YEARS OF MODI'S ECONOMIC WAR ON THE PEOPLE

▲ V. Arun Kumar

On 30 October 2022, hundreds of people standing on a cable suspension bridge over Machchhu River in Gujarat's Morbi, felt a tremor underneath them. Suddenly, the bridge crumbled like a pack of cards, claiming more than 140 lives and injuring thousands. The tragedy exposed the trail of corruption where a watch-making company, Oreva (Ajanta group) with no experience or portfolio for construction had been awarded the contract for maintenance and operations of this bridge. The contract awarded by Morbi municipality to the company was worth 2 crore. It has now come to light that the company only spent Rs 12 lakh, or 6% of the allotted money for renovating the bridge.

This trail of corruption and criminal negligence is brings our attention to another criminal act that struck the nation in 2016—Demonetisation—which was claimed to be undertaken to weed out corruption (among many others evils). In a sudden move on November 8, 2016 at 8.15 pm, Prime Minister Modi had announced the demonetisation (*note bandi*) of Rs. 1000 and Rs 500 notes. It was claimed that this move was targeted against black money, corruption and terrorism.

In effect, this move unleashed an economic war, the effects of which are still present, after six years. Indian economy is in recession, the cost of living is increased and inflation is skyrocketing. More than 200 people lost their lives in the wake of this announcement, trying to negotiate the sudden change. The government's only response was to declare that, "ordinary citizens are always ready to make sacrifices and face difficulties for the benefit of the nation." While the sacrifices were made by the ordinary citizens, there is no sign of the promised benefits.

Instead, tragedies like that on Morbi bridge, which happened as a direct result of corruption, continue to unfold.

According to RBI's own data in 2018, 99.3% of the demonetised banknotes, or Rs.15.3 trillion of the Rs.15.41 trillion that had been demonetised, were deposited with the banking system. That means almost all the money that was supposed to be in circulation or private hands came back. And, if this included any black money it would have all become white! The new notes have proved as vulnerable to counterfeits as their old avatars and the incidence of terrorism has certainly not gone down.

The Modi government also claimed that notebandi was a desirable step towards formalisation and a cashless economy. But ,as per the cash flow data, since 2016, there has been a steady increase in cash transactions and six years later, currency notes in circulation are 72 % higher than in November 2016, just before demonetisation. That is, the cash in circulation now, far exceeds, the levels before demonetisation.

In terms of the economy, the impact of demonetisation has pushed the country into a spiralling economic recession. Along with the new tax regime of GST, the demonetisation has led to the crushing disruption of agriculture and uprooting of micro and small scale enterprises. The impact was so severe, that despite the increase in cash flow today, the micro and small scale enterprises were never able to recover, with many closing down and rendering tens of thousands job-less. According to CMIE data more than 95 lakh jobs were lost during the immediate aftermath of the demonetisation. The unorganised sector, especially women were hit the hardest by the combined effect of demonetisation, GST and lockdown.



According to reports, while only 19% of women remained employed, 47% had not returned to work till the end of 2020.

Just a year after the demonetisation, the richest 1% got much richer, much faster and their share in wealth increased from 58% in 2016 to 73% in 2017. At the same time in the same period, the income share of the poor rose by a meagre 1%.

We must understand that demonetisation has its root in the global capitalist system, with the international agencies like International Monetary Fund and the World Bank pushing for greater formalisation of the economy to ensure organised labour force utilisation for capitalist production and profit. In a report in 2021, the Centre for Financial Accountability (CFA) noted that the demonetisation idea had been aggressively pushed by the big capital through the Better than Cash Alliance funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Citi Foundation, Ford Foundation, Mastercard, Omidyar Network and Visa Inc. This is an alliance that India joined exactly a year before demonetisation.

When he said 'give me just 50 days and all your big notes and I shall give you freedom from black money', his exhortation was a poor copy of the famous words by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose: 'give me blood and I shall give you freedom'. But six years later, the people remain devastated by the crippling effects of demonetisation, and feel cheated by the *jumlas* of the Modi government. ■

TIME TO DEFEAT THE MODI CULT AND END BJP MISRULE

▲ Dipankar Bhattacharya

It is once again election season for the people of Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and Gujarat. Himachal Pradesh has already voted to form the next Assembly and government, Delhi will be voting on December 4 to elect its reconstituted Municipal Corporation and Gujarat goes to the polls in two phases on December 1 and 5. Desperate to defend its thoroughly discredited and non performing dispensations, the BJP is once again relying on another high-voltage Modi campaign and Modi, in turn, depends on his loyal 'godi media' to amplify his campaign of mass distraction. And the campaign is getting increasingly insulting for the electorate and ominous for the future of India's electoral system.

In Gujarat, the Morbi bridge collapse has clinically exposed the corrupt and callous nature of prolonged BJP rule in the state that the Sangh propaganda machinery has hyped up as the so-called 'Gujarat model of development and good governance'. The godi media has dutifully suppressed this massive scam, instead highlighting Modi's visit to the Morbi hospital which was again a shameful exercise in self-promotion. Earlier we were treated to another propaganda scam with the PM faking a visit to a pseudo school. And what now appears to be becoming another propaganda routine, in both Gujarat and Himachal we have been shown viral videos of Modi's convoy stopping to let ambulances pass.

This propaganda blitzkrieg aimed at projecting the dictator as a caring and compassionate leader is however not enough to satiate Modi's hunger for more publicity. He therefore keeps playing the victim card and inventing ever newer opportunities to promote and project himself. Around the sixth anniversary of the disastrous demonetisation when common Indians were recalling the enormous

pain and loss they had to suffer and the huge economic price India had to pay for arguably India's biggest economic fraud and political stunt till date, Modi was telling us how his government prioritised delivery over publicity! Coming from a 'camerajeevi' narcissist who is accompanied by cameramen even while visiting his mother or visiting temples and who habitually pushes away anybody coming between him and his closest companion, the camera, could anything be more untrue ever?

On another occasion Modi told us how he had learned to endure and turn heavy daily doses of abuse into nutritious diets! This from a leader who has been notoriously intolerant of even the mildest of criticism, sending dissenting voices to jail, who infamously walked off in the middle of a television interview when asked a single inconvenient question about the Gujarat genocide perpetrated under his watch as Gujarat CM and who will go down in history as India's only prime minister who has never addressed a genuine press conference, granting only scripted interviews to certified godi media journalists! From periodically inventing conspiracies allegedly threatening his life to alleging 'humiliation' by the so-called 'establishment elite' and now this fairytale of daily abuses, Modi continues to play the victim card to perfection.

In Himachal, the BJP has been beset with massive internal dissension with more than thirty rebel candidates remaining in the fray despite all-out efforts by the Sangh-BJP high command to stop them. A video of Narendra Modi making a personal phone call to a rebel candidate has gone viral. Unable to control the rebellion, Modi openly told his audience that MLAs did not matter and people should actually vote for



Modi by pressing the lotus button! The politics of absolute centralisation of power and unbridled personality cult could not be more explicit.

The godi media is of course leaving no stones unturned to distract the people's attention from the pressing issues of everyday existence by whipping up nationalist frenzy and sharpening communal polarisation. The T20 World Cup became an opportune occasion for the godi media to record a new low! Beginning with India's sensational last-ball victory over Pakistan in the first league match, the media went hyper to predict an India-Pakistan final and a glorious India victory in a dream final over the Pakistan team, termed 'Babar Sena' to heighten the jingoistic and communal quotient. Before the India-England semifinal, one channel paraded a panel of astrologers who all predicted an Indian victory after a tense battle. The match however turned out to be totally onesided with England defeating India by ten wickets!

Amidst this celebration of obscurantism, hate and lies, we can only hope that the aggrieved people of Himachal, Gujarat and Delhi will succeed in seeing through this game and make effective use of their votes to end the BJP's misrule. ■

THE KEJRIWAL CONUNDRUM: BHAGAT SINGH AND AMBEDKAR PORTRAITS FOR VOTES, LAXMI AND GANESHA IMAGES FOR NOTES

▲ Dipankar Bhattacharya

Even as Narendra Modi seeks to lure the electorate in election-bound Gujarat by conjuring dreams of mega investment and grand development, the collapse of a British era suspension bridge in Morbi which has taken a toll of at least 134 lives has exposed the sordid reality of the much trumpeted Gujarat model. Details emerging from the Morbi bridge tragedy point to a shocking pattern of governance – utterly inept and corrupt. Morbi-based wall clock making company Oreva was awarded the contract to repair and maintain the century-old suspension bridge. The contract which is valid till 1937 and allows the company to charge the public for using the bridge was finalised reportedly without any open tender. The company claimed to have completed renovation by spending 2 crore rupees in just a few months and the bridge was hurriedly reopened before the elections only to invite this disaster. The official narrative now seeks to blame overcrowding as the reason for the collapse, but let us not forget that people were allowed to access the bridge only after buying tickets.

Six years ago when a section of an under-construction flyover had crashed in Kolkata, Narendra Modi had immediately made it an election issue, calling the crash a message from God to the people of West Bengal to save West Bengal from the corrupt and inefficient rule of the TMC and bring the BJP to power. Will he now treat the Morbi bridge collapse as a divine message to save Gujarat from the corrupt crony rule of the BJP? The Oreva group, like most business groups in Gujarat are pretty close to the Modi-Shah duo and the FIR filed after the bridge collapse has already left the company out of the ambit of the case. In all likelihood, the case would

now be sought to be hushed up by paying some token compensation to the victims and meting out punishment to a few ground-level employees. And the Morbi bridge collapse has already been erased from the public discourse by the dominant media.

The dream of 'development' in Modi's poll campaign is always woven with the threads of hate and lies. The hate campaign in Gujarat this time is directed not just against Muslims but also against urban Naxals. Once again using the Narmada river project as a symbol of pride and abundant source of benefits for Gujarat, Modi blamed Medha Patkar as an urban Naxal for trying to stall development by foregrounding the issue of displacement. Carrying on from his 'andolanjeevi' diatribe delivered on the floor of parliament, Modi has now emphasised the need to uproot pen-wielding Naxals while addressing through videoconferencing a brainstorming session of Home Ministers. Defence of the Constitution and free speech, justice and human rights, environment conservation, rehabilitation of the displaced and dispossessed – the entire agenda of the democratic movement is now being identified as urban naxalism to be dealt with by invoking UAPA or similar draconian laws.

How should the opposition respond to a regime which unleashes such fascist offensive to hide its complete failure and betrayal in terms of addressing the basic needs of the people and upholding the basic tenets of rule of law? A decade ago, the Aam Aadmi Party emerged in Delhi against the backdrop of popular anti-corruption and anti-rape struggles in the concluding years of the UPA-II regime. In addition to Delhi, it has now managed to come to power in Punjab and is reportedly evoking

considerable response in Gujarat. How should it respond when the rapists and murderers of Bilkis Bano and her family are set free and accorded a hero's welcome on the 75th anniversary of the country's independence and notorious rape convict Ram Raheem is granted forty days' parole in Haryana just on the eve of Haryana's three-phase panchayat elections?

Arvind Kejriwal has now come up with the most definitive answer to this question. He says India needs the blessings of the Hindu gods and goddesses to lift the country out of the present economic crisis and the best way to secure their blessings is print the images of Laxmi, the presumed goddess of prosperity, and Ganesha, the problem-solving god of wisdom, on India's currency notes. With this one recommendation Kejriwal has made it clear that in spite of paying lip service to Bhagat Singh and Ambedkar, he is ready to bid goodbye to rationalism and embrace obscurantism in his battle against the BJP. Instead of holding the Modi government accountable for its sheer non-performance and divisive and hate-filled ideology, he would rather try and beat Narendra Modi in the game of absurd ideas and competitive emotional appeals to the religious faith of India's majority religious community of Hindus. This political line is often described as soft Hindutva and sought to be defended in the name of its mass appeal and acceptance and legitimised by giving the example of Gandhi and his use of religious idioms and metaphors during India's freedom movement.

Kejriwal will not be the first politician to try and adopt this strategy. Like Kejriwal, Rajiv Gandhi too had made his appearance in Indian politics with a clean and modern image and a forward-looking vision of a scientifically and technologically advanced twenty-first century India. In 1984 he became the prime minister of a government with the biggest parliamentary majority in India till date, when the BJP was reduced to just two seats in the Lok Sabha. But now he

is remembered for having actually emboldened the BJP, first with his ill-advised move on the Shah Bano verdict and then the balancing act in Ayodhya. Even now some Congress leaders rush to acknowledge Rajiv Gandhi as the real architect of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The attempt of Kejriwal to try and beat Narendra Modi on the turf of Hindutva is liable

to meet with a similar fate.

It is not the appeal to religiosity that explains the BJP's electoral success, it is the BJP's ability to whip up a hate-filled anti-Muslim frenzy and assert this majoritarianism as nationalism that works for it. The answer to this hate and aggression lies in a decisive social and ideological counter-mobilisation,

not in legitimising it through competition or complicity. Peddling religious symbols on currency notes as a solution to economic crisis, and that too with the portraits of two of modern India's greatest visionaries hanging on the wall behind, will be remembered as the vintage Kejriwal moment of betrayal to the cause of modern India. ■

CLIMATE CRISIS: ANOTHER CONFERENCE, ANOTHER FUND

▲ N. Sai Balaji



Photo by ZAHID HUSSAIN

Families sit near their belongings inundated by flood waters in Pakistan's southwestern Balochistan province on August 28, 2022.

The 27th Convention of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Convention of Parties (COP) was held at Sharm El-Sheikh Egypt from November 6th to 18th, 2022 to address the growing concerns of climate change. This COP 27 took place at a time when in 2022, the world has witnessed rise in extreme weather events. From massive floods in cities of India, Pakistan, etc., to the worst heat wave in a century across Europe, the failure of countries to come together to address climate change and its

impacts has been left exposed.

The COP 27 was organised in the backdrop of the Paris Agreement of 2015, that discarded the Common But Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) (distributing the burden of emission reductions based on historical emissions) at the international negotiations. The new policy of Voluntary Emission Reduction programme introduced through the Paris Agreement means countries will independently decide commitment reductions, which are not legally enforceable, unlike the previous setup under Kyoto Protocol of 1997. Since

2015, the world has witnessed how the shift from mandated reduction to voluntary cuts diluted the efforts to combat climate emissions by leaving the historical emitters – the industrialised, developed and rich countries – from any accountability.

COP 27 EGYPT: THE ISSUE OF LOSS AND DAMAGE

COP 27 began with the inclusion of the agenda on “loss and damage” – compensating countries for climate-induced damages – to the summit's main agenda. Similarly, another standing agenda of warning “everyone on the planet” about the danger of hazardous weather events in the next five years. This agenda was introduced by UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, who by including the latter, tried to compensate for earlier years of absence and criticism by poor countries for not taking their concerns into consideration. UNFCCC's quest for climate equity has been badly tarnished due to lack of their inclusive agenda that cater to those countries impacted by climate change, especially the poor and developing countries. By including “loss and damages” and mechanism to warn people of extreme and hazardous weather events, the UNFCCC is trying to minimise its loss of credentials.

Can COP 27 undo the damages made by developed countries in the earlier conferences? Are enough steps being taken to tackle the growing dangers of climate change?

It is difficult to say whether the climate talks are going in the right direction, considering the world witnessing heavy losses due to

impacts of extreme weather events. Take the Pakistan's massive flooding for example. The flooding, which began in the month of June 2022, has killed more than 1,700 people, among whom nearly 400 of them were children, while millions have been displaced. The overall cost of damages by the extreme inundation is estimated at around \$40 billion and similarly, the damages caused by Cyclone Amphan in Bangladesh and India in 2020 are estimated at \$15 billion. Considering the contributions of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh to world Green House Gas (GHG's) emissions, the impacts they are suffering is extremely disproportionate.

HISTORIC DEAL OR HISTORIC INJUSTICE?

The COP 27 extended into the weekend as the two-week-long negotiations failed to provide a breakthrough. In his speech at the closing plenary session, COP 27 President Sameh Shoukry noted the signifying consensus countries reached on "loss and damage" fund. The idea of the fund is to pave way for countries battered by the impact of global warming and climate change. However, the idea of the fund is only for "particularly vulnerable countries", thereby reducing the scope of countries covered by it. Despite its lack of scope, can this new fund bring a promise of hope or dismay to developing and poor countries? Looking into history, it feels as though this will become a point of further contestation in the future.

For example, according to research, developing countries need around \$2 trillion annually to reduce their GHG gasses to meet their net zero targets. However, looking at the past record of Climate Fund and the issues it has raised over the years, the promise of a new fund with onus on developed countries to pay repatriations looks bleak. Also, developed countries headed by US signalling the shift of responsibility towards private sector to fund climate finance, it will be interesting to note how climate justice will be achieved.

Similarly, the formal draft that went for discussion on Friday – November 18th, 2022, i.e., the last day of COP, failed into include the proposal for phase down of all fossil fuels. This call was initiated by India and supported by the European Union and several other countries at the COP 27. With the increasing impact of extreme weather events, it is important for the world to acknowledge the fact that fossil fuels, which includes oil and coal, have and are contributing towards GHG's. The final draft negotiated at COP 27, instead repeated several of Glasgow Climate Pact texts – "to accelerate measures towards the 'phase down' of unabated coal power and 'phase out' and rationalisation of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies". This, yet again, aims to shift the burden of tacking fossil fuel emissions on the developing and poor countries.

Unfortunately, the trend at UNFCCC negotiations with the latest COP 27 is only intensifying the perception that it is the poor who will shoulder the burden of mitigation and adaptation.

THE POLITICS OF CLIMATE FUND AND US EFFORTS TO PRIVATISE FUNDING

In 2009, the COP 15 at Copenhagen set a climate finance target of \$100 billion as climate finance target for aiding developing and poor countries to tackle climate change. This fund will be contributed by the developed countries who have been historically responsible for contributing towards GHG's. However, the present state of affairs for this climate fund is abysmal as most of the countries that assured of contributions have either held back or evaded this responsibility.

The developed countries have failed to contribute to the climate fund and now United States one of the biggest GHG emitter and historical contributor is talking of privatising the climate fund. US President Joe Biden in his speech at COP 27 wants the onus of delivering climate finance on private sector through investments. This is a disastrous proposal as it clearly shows developed countries want to shy away from any kind of

accountability and wish to continue business as usual. Moreover, private entities cannot be held accountable under international agreements and climate finance is not a project of profit earning, but a necessity to undo historical injustice through financing, adaptation and mitigation.

Droughts, cyclones, floods and other extreme weather events have not only increased, but are proving destructive and has become a permanent phenomenon for earth climate. It is important to note that world leaders like former US President Donald Trump, former Brazilian President Bolsanaro and other leaders, who did not accept climate change and drew policies exacerbating climate exploitation, have been defeated by the people. However, India under the Prime Ministership of Narendra Modi, who himself notoriously declared that it was not the climate, but people's ability to bear the cold that has changed and his BJP governments at Centre and in States, where it is in power, has been blatantly following policies that further degrade environment and the climate. For example, the BJP government in Madhya Pradesh is planning to permit Essel Mining's, owned by Aditya Birla Group, to cut down more than two lakh trees for a diamond-mining project in Buxwaha. Similarly, the National Board for Wildlife's Standing Committee is planning to use 98.59 hectares of land from Dehing Phatkai elephant reserve forest for a coal-mining project. It has already granted approval for mining in 57.20 hectares of forest land in Saleki Proposed Reserve Forest.

The seriousness of world leaders in tackling climate change has been time and again exposed, proving their incapability to pin responsibility on historical emitters and to develop policies that don't replicate the past. However, the saga of a piece-meal approach to climate change as we see now won't help solve the issue, rather will complicate lives of the poor, marginalised and vulnerable across the globe. ■

GENETICALLY MODIFIED MUSTARD: MAJOR CONCERNS

▲ Madhurima Bakshi



On October 18th, 2022, Genetic Engineering Appraisal Committee (GEAC) under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has recommended that the 'environmental release' of the genetically modified (GM) mustard variety DMH (Dhara Mustard Hybrid)-11 be for open trials, field demonstrations and seed production.

WHAT IS DMH-11?

DMH-11 is a genetically modified hybrid variety of the brown mustard species *Brassica juncea*. This step has paved way for commercialisation of the country's first GM food crop. The hybrid mustard DMH-11 developed by the scientists of Centre for Genetic Manipulation of Crop Plants (CGMCP) under Delhi University is a result of a cross between two varieties: Varuna and Early Heera-2, which contains two foreign genes isolated from a soil bacterium *bacillus amyloliquefaciens*. Transgenic DMH-11 involves **Barnase** gene that confers male sterility and **Barstar** gene that restores DMH-11's ability to produce fertile seeds; these two genes allow for cross-pollination and hybridisation in mustard, which

is largely a self-pollinating plant. Put very simply, the barnase gene confers male sterility to a plant in which it is inserted and enables crossing of the male sterile line with the fertility restorer (barstar gene) line – to produce fertile hybrid plants and seeds. The number "11" refers to the number of generations after which the desirable traits are manifested. Apart from these two, there is a third **bar** gene that enables DMH-11 to produce enzyme phosphinothricin-N-acetyl-transferase, responsible for herbicide resistance.

ISSUES WITH HERBICIDE TOLERANCE

Presence of the bar gene makes GM mustard plants herbicide tolerant (HT) to the spraying of glufosinate ammonium, a herbicide used for killing weeds. Reportedly, the Bar-Barstar-Barnase gene is a patented technology of Bayer Crop Science. Around the world, there are many cautions in cultivating HT crops by altering genes. Glufosinate is a broad-spectrum herbicide marketed worldwide as 'Liberty Link' and 'Basta' by Bayer. It extensively wipes out weeds as well as those plants which does not have the

Bar gene. Essentially, this is done to differentiate between the GM crops from the non-GM progeny and with a glufosinate-herbicide spray the non-sterile hybrid plants will be eliminated. This will ensure that sterile GM crops are grown over successive generations.

Glufosinate tolerant DMH-11 would encourage uncontrolled use of this herbicide. The report submitted by CGMCP talks about the safety of these genes, whereas, there is no discussion with respect to biosafety studies for glufosinate. Practically, GM mustard hasn't been evaluated as a HT crop posing potential risks on the ecosystem. European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) reported high-long-term risk of glufosinate ammonium on mammals, including severe developmental toxicity induced by maternal toxicity. The claim of CGMCP that glufosinate is only allowed to be used as a selectable marker in breeding and seed production field and not in commercial cultivation fields is also self-contradictory. If the bar-gene has been introduced to avoid contamination from other lines and to maintain pure parental lines, then without spray of glufosinate, how will they ensure successive generations of pollen-free crops?

With excessive use of glufosinate, there will be emergence of glufosinate resistant weed species in due course, due to artificial selection pressure on weeds. Also, too much use of agrochemicals not just kills the weeds, but those small herbs used for consumption or medicinal properties in our country. Mustard is one of the top three highest produced oil seed crop in India. With abundant pollen and nectar, mustard attracts pollinator insects especially the honey bees. Commercial cultivation of GM mustard would inevitably result cross pollination between GM and wild varieties of mustard. The rich wild mustard biodiversity and germplasm of India is thus under risk of being contaminated, which can never be reversed. This would make the indigenous

varieties vulnerable especially in the backdrop of climate change and consequent crisis in food security. Due to 'super selection' of DMH-11 mustard plant for its resistance to herbicides, practice of intercropping or intensive cultivation would also be hampered. Commercialization of GM mustard also might pose a threat on the population of honey bees and production of honey in the surrounding areas. The particular gene of concern in DMH-11 could escape into the environment and alter the genetic makeup of the weeds making them herbicide resistant 'super weeds'. Farmers in Punjab expressed concern that if the herbicide-tolerant GM mustard is allowed, it will lead to the increased use of chemicals and render the leaves unfit for consumption.

The Technical Expert Committee (TEC), formed by the Supreme Court in 2012, had recommended a total ban on all herbicide tolerant crops. The TEC report said, *"The major concern with HT approaches is the excessive reliance on increased amounts of one or two herbicides which results in strong selective pressure for the emergence of herbicide resistant weeds and a negative impact on sustainability."* The TEC found these crops "unsustainable" and "unsuitable" for India, noting that the herbicides sprayed on HT crops could cause cancer. **They suggested a ban on genetic modification of crops which have been originated or having rich diversity in India.** In 2004, the chairman of the Task Force in Agricultural Biotechnology advised against commercialisation of HT crops as they eliminate the need for manual weeding, a job undertaken by many rural women in India. As per a report published in The Economic Times, even 25% cultivation of GM mustard would impact the livelihood of millions of farmers by reducing 4.25 crore employment days.

INCREASING YIELD?

Mustard is cultivated in 6-7 million hectares land during the winter season in Rajasthan, Haryana, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh and other

states. Currently, India imports about 55-60% of its domestic edible-oil requirement. Hybrid technology is a major tool to meet increasing demand of crops all over the world. While the contained trials on DMH-11 suggest that DMH-11 has 28% higher yields than its parent Varuna, there have been conflicting reports on irregularities, manipulation of testing and data, compromising scientific integrity regarding the biosafety evaluations. The detailed trial data conducted in 2014-15 have not even been disclosed. There is also lack of clarity as to what effect consumption of these crops can have on the health of humans and livestock, while scientists have been talking about the possible adverse effects of genetically modified crops on health in general for a long time. In 2016, many stakeholders, including breeders and ecologists presented evidence to the GEAC that yield data of GM HT mustard is manipulated, and the testing itself was unscientific. In its testing, GM mustard hybrid DMH-11 was not compared with non-GM hybrids. The comparators used for GM mustard testing violated ICAR protocols as well as the conditions under which permission was granted by GEAC. Several complaints also point towards the nexus between the regulatory bodies and GM crop developers.

Farmers' organizations, environmentalists and concerned citizens have always raised their concerns regarding GM crops, seeking transparency in the results of field trials and demanded that a comprehensive and rigorous biosafety protocol be put in place by GEAC. Due to various doubts and vagueness in the claims made, many countries have banned cultivation and sale of GMOs including Austria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Russia, while substantial restrictions on GMOs exist in more than 60 countries.

PAST EXPERIENCES

Farmers of this country already have an extremely bitter experience of cultivating genetically modified Bt

cotton, most notably in Maharashtra. The Bt cotton was genetically modified to produce Bt toxin in order to combat some insects. After the introduction of Bt cotton in 2002, production increased initially, but within a few years the situation deteriorated. Eventually, other insects that were not previously thought to be particularly harmful had flourished, causing crop damage. Also, the target insects of Bt cotton after adaptation became resistant to Bt toxin, limiting the efficacy of Bt seeds and increasing pesticide use in long run contrary to the advertised benefits. Farmers solely dependent on the big companies for highly priced seeds and fertilizers, due to its monopoly, suffered from huge losses. The continuing spate of farmers suicides in areas of Bt Cotton cultivation suggests that at least in the current Indian conditions this is a curse on our agriculture and farmers. Later in 2009, after issuing the license for commercial cultivation of Bt brinjal, the government was forced to cancel it due to strong opposition from scientists, environmentalists as well as farmers.

CORPORATE CONTROL ON FARMING

In 2002, Proagro Seed Company (Bayer's subsidiary), applied for commercial approval for a similar Bar-Barnase-Barstar mustard which was then turned down owing to lack of evidence of better yield. There is considerable ambiguity regarding the ownership and rights over this technology and the commercial GM mustard seeds. The approval for GM mustard was once given by the central government earlier in 2017, which was halted then as scientists, environmentalists and activists moved the Supreme Court against it. Rather than addressing the structural problems of agriculture, the ruling classes in India have been trying to promote GM crops vehemently. Already Bt Cotton has been used on a large scale and the experience is highly alarming. DMH-11 would encourage farmers to abundantly use herbicide (Glufosinate) inflating the markets of those seeds and

herbicides whose health effects raises many concerns. Globally, the nexus between monopoly companies of seeds, agrochemicals and drugs is well known. Genetically modified mustard cultivation could further increase this monopoly. Presently, the corporatization of agriculture is aggravated by introduction of patented crop seeds, contract farming, and monopolization of specialized pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers essential to its cultivation.

DRMR, ICAR's research centre had already sown the GM mustard hybrid DMH-11 in 6 field trial plots for evaluation. As a plea challenging this

environmental clearance has been filed in the Supreme Court, there is a temporary stay on this field trial. The Court has adjourned the hearing to November 29th, 2022. But if the pressure of the street movement and scientific community does not intensify, it is difficult to say how much relief will be finally obtained from the Supreme Court, especially when the government is increasingly trying to expand the cultivation of GM crops in this country. The recent clearance by the government for the release of DMH11 is depicted as a 'bold' decision to move towards 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' by meeting the aspirations of scientific and agricultural community.

But the farming community in the country is struggling to get minimum support price of their crop! Once the commercial approval is granted, it will also initiate commercial cultivation of other domestic and foreign GM crops, including brinjal, rice, wheat, corn. Eventually, agriculture will go beyond the control of farmers and scientists and the private companies will gain control over the agrarian market. The courageous peasant movement have resisted the anti-farmer farm laws for now, but the GM food crops could pave the way for corporate farming through the backdoor, which we all need to be cautious about. ■

SHRADDHA WALKAR MURDER AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

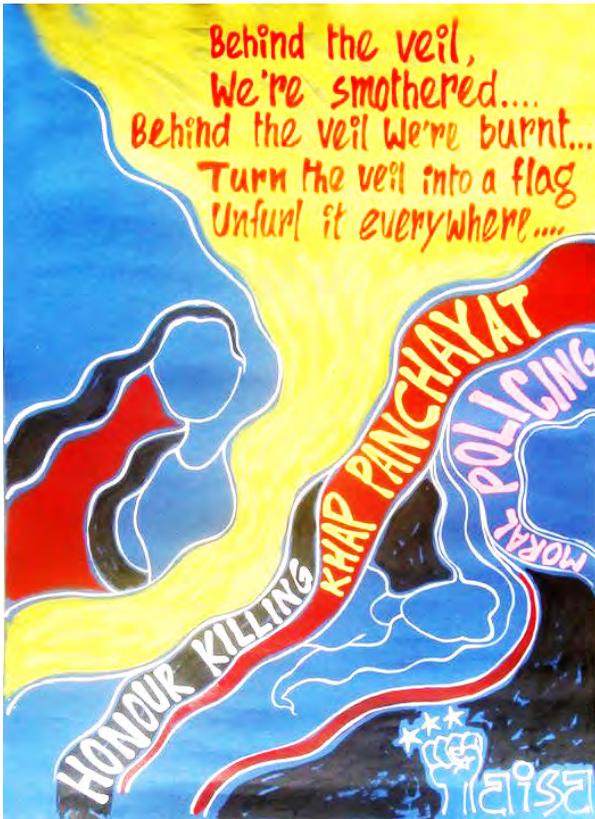
▲ Shivani Nag

The sheer brutality of abusing, hitting and murdering one's partner and then chopping their body into several pieces in an attempt to dispose while carrying on with one's life is chillingly disturbing, and yet this is neither infrequent or distant. Violence against women in an intimate relationship space is a disturbing reality that remains extremely difficult to expose and challenge for many reasons. Several of these can be seen leading up to and in form of responses to Shraddha Walkar's abuse and murder.

It is true that in many families across faiths and castes, male children through processes of observation, social conditioning and direct instructions, recognise their privilege and 'entitlements' very early in life. While there are many who in their life journeys also reflect and unlearn, the fact remains that once established, privileges and entitlements are not easily unlearned or given up. When we reflect on incidents like Shraddha's murder, what is

important is that we also evaluate our own roles in strengthening or diluting this misogynist, toxic and alienating contexts that women often find themselves in. In this particular case, what could have pushed a young girl who could fight her family for love to accept abuse in a relationship? If she could have gathered courage to walk out of her parental home when her choices were not supported, why could not she gather to courage to walk out of an abusive relationship? In cases like these, we often forget that for women, acts of self-made choices come with great costs and at great risks. Some may argue that perhaps it is these very risks that parents try to warn their daughters against and that the risks become inevitable when the parental concerns and warnings are defied. This is a deceptive argument. If I were really keen to protect my daughter from the risk of entering a violent, suffocating relationship, I would be keener to get to know the potential partner. I would want to keep the channels of communication open with my daughter to ensure that in

case of any abuse or concern, she can come to me. I would want to assure her that she never needs to accept abuse from anyone. When parents cite religion, caste, class, ethnicity, etc. as reasons to refuse their children the right to choose their partners, they are in fact telling their children that they do not even care to get to know someone who makes their child happy or feel loved. They lose the opportunity to recognise real red flags if any. In fact, far from protecting their children from risks, they heighten the risks by removing the existing support and security network at a time when new relationships are being explored and formed. For a young girl who moved into a new city, whose family had cut ties with her for the choice of partner she made and who along with her partner was facing financial struggles, could walking out of an abusive relationship been easy? Whom could she have turned to? Her family with whom she had been out of touch and who till months after her murder were not aware of her absence? Friends, who despite their concern, may or may not have



been in a situation to offer her an unconditional abode? Neighbours, who may already have been judging her for living in? Or the police, to whom if she had complained may have first chided her or shamed her for her 'morals' (going by innumerable such incidents of victim blaming in the past) before even registering the complaint. Given the larger political climate, I also wonder, if she was worried about the larger repercussions on her and her partner given their inter-faith relationship. None of these create easy conditions for standing up against abuse and walking out. On the contrary, they often heighten men's confidence that they can get away with abusing women, especially their partners.

There are many including several in the ruling party who while expressing shock over the murder have found in it an opportunity to discredit young women who show the courage to stand by their choices. Kaushal Kishore, the Union Minister of State for Housing and Urban Affairs, cautioned young 'educated' women against "live-in relationships". Isn't this another way of warning women that if they want to choose their partners and delay or refuse the institution of marriage, then the state will not guarantee their safety and wellbeing? This statement, apart from being extremely misogynist, patriarchal, anti-constitutional and indicative of the government absolving itself of the responsibility to safeguard women, is also gravely misinformed. It appears to

suggest that it is only women who refuse the institution of marriage or defy the parental dictates of whom to marry, who become victims of domestic abuse. The statement is an attempt to erase the brutal history and the present of domestic violence that several women who married as per the family's choice continue to face. Are women who married grooms approved by their families and communities not harassed, beaten up or burnt for inadequate dowry or for not being able to produce a male heir or for speaking up against any form of humiliation and oppression at home?

Then there are those in the government and media who have used this moment to cast aspersions against inter-faith love relationships by once again raising the false bogey of love-jihad. The facts emerging in the case themselves disprove any such claim since a key point of contention between the couple apparently was not the boy's insistence on conversion before marriage but unwillingness to marry at the moment. However, the raising of the love-jihad slogan, a slogan that has time and again been proved false and misguided, is not even intended to reflect the facts of the case. It is aimed to vitiate the atmosphere, to make the minorities still more vulnerable and to continue to deny women their agency to love.

Both these attempts, far from helping strengthen the struggle against domestic and intimate partner violence instead contribute towards nurturing the toxic, suffocating and alienating situation that Shraddha found herself in. The recent Supreme Court judgement acquitting the accused in Kiran Negi's rape, kidnapping and murder case shows how our investigation and judicial systems continue to fail women time after time. In Kiran Negi's case, the acquittal of the accused was ensured by the numerous procedural lapses by the police and the prosecution. In such context, it is not just ironical but rather insidious, when someone like the Assam CM, while campaigning for the BJP in Surat, Gujarat, says- "Vote for Modi - without a strong leader in the country, murderers like Aftab will emerge in every city and we will not be able to safeguard our society." For one, Modi is the PM while this incident has happened and second, he is the head of the same government that approved the premature release of 11 convicts serving a life sentence for raping a 5 month pregnant woman and her mother in Gujarat.

As more facts emerge in Shraddha Walkar's murder case, it is important to remember that the struggle for ensuring justice for Shraddha Walkar is also a struggle against the forced trade offs between- safety and choice, and wellbeing and freedom, that are imposed on women. And for this, we must remain alert towards any attempts to manipulate and divert an anger that is rightfully directed at violence against women, towards a community or women's right to choice. ■

LATIN AMERICA: LEFT RESURGENCE, FAR RIGHT THREATS

Recent developments in Latin America epitomise the global struggle between a resurgent left, and a powerful, internationally linked far-right, between visions of social justice and environmental protection, and a destructive corporate capitalism bent on escalating plunder. The rise to power of left wing political forces in Chile and Colombia, and the hair's-breadth defeat of the fascist Bolsonaro by Lula's Worker's Party in Brazil have been deeply heartening for progressive observers across the world. At the same time, there are many complexities to this picture including the limitations of 'post-neoliberal' welfare measures based on extractivism and high commodity prices, continuing deeply embedded structural racism and exclusion of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, and of course continuing US imperialist intervention in Latin America and the Caribbean region. This cover feature of Liberation comprises a series of write-ups and interviews which analyse recent developments in Brazil, Colombia, Chile and Haiti.

LEFT RESURGENCE IN LATIN AMERICA AND TASKS AHEAD

*Liberation spoke to **Cira Pascual Marquina**, regarding the recent victory of progressive and left parties in Latin America, and what are the tasks and challenges ahead for the people's movements in the region in the backdrop of US imperialist onslaught. Cira Pascual Marquina is a political science professor at the Bolivarian University of Venezuela and a co-founder of Escuela de Cuadros, a Marxist education program. She is a political education coordinator and teacher at the Pluriversidad, the educational initiative of El Panal Commune and part the venezuelanalysis.com editorial team. With Chris Gilbert, she is the co-author of Venezuela, the Present as Struggle (Monthly Review), Communal and Working Class Resistance, a book series and ¿Para qué sirve El Capital?*

The defeat of Jair Bolsonaro and the victory of Lula da Silva and Workers' Party of Brazil (PT) has raised hope for anti-fascist movements across the world. Can you shed some light on the Brazilian elections and also the role of popular/progressive movements in defeating Bolsonaro.

Cira Pascual: Indeed, Lula's victory is a victory for the working class, for the working people of Brazil and of Latin America. In fact, getting rid of Bolsonaro, who is a neo-fascist, is very important for the whole continent and for the global working class.

Now, as leftists, as communists, as people committed to the radical transformation of society, we should also look at the victory from an objective perspective. In other words,

we should not be naive. Lula won with a margin of just about 1.5 percent. The difference was very small! But on top of that, Bolsonaroism has control over the Senate, it is the main force in the Congress, and it won the governorship in the most populated states in the country, including Sao Paulo.

So what is Bolsonaroism? Bolsonaroism is part of the global Neo-fascist upsurge led by the lumpen sectors of the bourgeoisie, which are, of course, classist, but also racist, sexist, homophobic, etcetera. Now, the bourgeoisie does not win the elections with its own votes: it requires the participation of other sectors to win an election. To understand the situation in Brazil, we should acknowledge that the Bolsonaro



#EleNão (Portuguese for "not him")
movement against fascist Jair Bolsonaro.

Photo by MAURO PIMENTEL

base includes important sectors of the middle class but also, sectors of the working class who are, most often, Christian evangelical. And, I should add, these sectors have a great distrust of the status quo. What does this mean? Clearly, the working class Bolsonaro bases are not our class enemies, and their distrust of the status quo could be turned into an anti-system force.

Walter Benjamin said that behind every fascism, there is a failed revolution, and this is important because it commits us to take a critical look at the periods when the PT was in power. If the Lula years were potentially a revolutionary moment, why is a working-class sector of the formerly PT base aligned with Bolsonarism now?

That apart, if we focus on the current juncture, we should realise that the coalition built by Lula is not exclusively centre-Left: it accommodates shades of the right as well, and that right will exert considerable weight. In fact, Lula's vice president is going to be Geraldo Alckmin. Alckmin is a former Lula contender, he is economically liberal, pro-market, and on top of that, he is a member of Opus Dei (Work of God), a conservative catholic outfit.

Then, I should also mention that half of the parliamentarians are pro-agrobusiness. This has huge implications because international agri-business interests in Brazil are destroying the Amazon rainforest and creating massive environmental havoc around the world.

But of course, the Lula coalition also brings together, and this is very important, left forces, including the Landless Workers' Movement (MST) – an anti-system mass organization and the most important social movement in Brazil – and the Communist Party of Brazil (*Partido Comunista do Brasil*).

The defeat of Bolsonaro is of course important, but we must remember that Bolsonarism and, in general, right-wing tendencies have not really been defeated. In other words, a new

battleground is opening up: we have a more advantageous correlation of forces, but the struggle goes on.

From that standpoint, the Left should be preparing for a battle on two fronts: guarding against the powerful rightwing forces and influences within the Lula coalition while struggling to defeat Bolsonarism. In fact, the second has to come with turning the Bolsonarist base's distrust of the status quo into an anti-system drive, but the potential anti-system drive has to find an anti-system counterpart in Lulism.

Latin America has been witnessing a series of electoral victories for left forces in many countries. How do you analyse this and what are the challenges ahead for progressive and left forces to ensure a more decisive defeat of the right wing?

Cira Pascual: While it is true there are now progressive governments across Latin America from Mexico to Colombia, from Venezuela to Chile to Brazil to Argentina, we should clarify that these are governments that, for now, are just contemplating reforms within the capitalist system. So, when we compare this “pink tide” with the previous “pink tide” led by Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Fidel Castro in Cuba, and Evo Morales in Bolivia, we should recognize that the present wave does not have the robust anti-capitalist and socialist direction of the earlier one.

The right in Latin America has a very important ally in US imperialism and, with US backing, it tends to take a fascistic turn. The Latin American Left must step up its anti-imperialist thrust – at the moment some of the progressive governments in the continent are very US-friendly – while combating the magnetism of fascist tendencies with radical policies.

While we see a left wing resurgence in Latin America, in Europe there is a rabid right wing shift. What will be the impact of current political scenario in Latin America on the people's struggle for justice and rights across the world.

Cira Pascual: This question ties nicely with the prior one. Latin America could indeed become a beacon again for the working class, as happened with Chavez and Fidel (and the ALBA project) in the first decade of the century. But, as I was saying before, we need to radicalise the progressive forces that are currently in power. It is hard to imagine that social democratic reforms would become a lighthouse for a global Left and working-class rebellion against capital. Of course, radicalization will not happen if the Left and the working class are not on the street. We have to push for our progressive governments to go from their Left discourse – which we celebrate – to pushing truly anti-capitalist policies. A cautious, overzealous, over-protective Left will actually open the path for the reconstitution of neo-fascist governments.

On one hand we see the US congratulating Lula's victory, while on the other there is a continuous attempt by the US to intervene in what it considers its 'backyard'. The US is pushing for military intervention in Haiti. How do you look at the current imperialist role of the US in the backdrop of political developments in Latin America?

Cira Pascual: When we think about Haiti, I think it is important to understand that Haitians have been in a permanent situation of anti-systemic rebellion for more than two centuries. In fact, the Haitian Revolution was the first social revolution in the continent. That is why the US and imperialist forces in general have been trying to crush the Haitian people for such a long time.

Now, as we speak, in Haiti there is a rebellion: the people are on the streets in an attempt to overthrow a non-elected president who is a puppet of the United States. Meanwhile, the US is again talking about military “intervention,” which is nothing other than a military invasion of Haiti. Again!

The working classes, the Left forces

and the communists of the world have to say, with one voice, “NO” to the US invasion of Haiti. The US continues to impose its will with violent and coercive measures in Latin America. The US has 76 military bases throughout the continent and continues to impose brutal sanctions on both Cuba and Venezuela.

The people of Latin America, however, are waging a robust anti-imperialist resistance, and Fidel and Chávez’s

socialist project continues to kindle sympathies around the world.

In the face of the mounting neo-fascist offensive at the global level, we have to rebuild a robust anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist block. There are very important anti-capitalist initiatives in Brazil. The Landless Workers Movement remains a powerful influence. Conditions in Venezuela are admittedly very difficult, but there

is a re-emergence of the communes – Chávez’s proposal for socialism –, which shows the emancipatory potential of territorial socialist alternatives. While defending the progressive governments in Latin America against imperialist intervention and neo-fascist destabilisation, as communists we also to continue to push forth and energise the anti-capitalist initiatives on the ground. ■

LULA’S VICTORY IN BRAZIL AND THE PATH AHEAD

▲ Surya

Lula da Silva, the former President and Workers’ Party (PT) candidate, won the Brazilian presidency with a narrow margin in the runoff election held on October 30th, 2022. The current President Jair Bolsonaro, known as the “Brazilian Trump,” received 49.10%. In Brazil, a presidential candidate needs more than 50% of the vote to win the election. On October 2nd, Lula received 48.4% of the votes, thus, necessitating the runoff election.

PANDEMIC AND THE BRAZILIAN ECONOMY

Brazil is the largest country in Latin America with a population of 217 million and a nominal gross domestic product (GDP) of \$ 1.8 Trillion making it the 12th largest economy in the world. According to a recent World Bank report on Brazil, COVID-19 wreaked havoc on the people and its economy. Brazil had more than 35 million diagnosed cases with more than 688,000 deaths. Even before the pandemic, 30% of Brazilians were poor and about 8% lived in extreme poverty. The inequality in Brazil has staggering disparities where 30% of the poor are Afro-Brazilian women

living in urban areas. While 75% of all children living in rural areas are poor. The pandemic has lowered household income with the most vulnerable 40% of the population being severely impacted.

The economic inequality in Brazil is such that the six richest men have the same wealth as the poorest 50% of the population. The richest 5% have the same income as the remaining 95%¹. These disparities exist in a country that is the world’s largest producer of soy and orange and a major producer of corn, beef, turkey and chicken. The country’s trade has become dependent on agribusiness and mining that Brazilian capitalists dominate. Brazil has the second-largest manufacturing sector in the Americas with industries such as automobiles, steel and petrochemicals. Automobile sector is dominated by foreign multinationals²

THE MAJOR CANDIDATES -

BOLSONARO AND LULA

Bolsonaro, a former army paratrooper who rose to the rank of captain, has been a major admirer of Brazil’s military dictatorship that ruled the country from 1964-1985. He has said that the military dictatorship

during its 30 years rule “should have killed more people.” Bolsonaro is an unabashed Trump admirer and openly denigrates women, indigenous and LGBTQ+ people.

The alliance that had backed Bolsonaro comes from three sectors: Agribusiness, evangelical Christians, and the security forces, specifically the military and the police. It is colloquially referred to as BBB – beef, Bible, and the bullet³. This authoritarian style of neoliberalism also has the judiciary as a key ally. Christian evangelicals have grown from 6.6% of the population in 1980 to 22.2% in 2010⁴.

Around 8% of the population identify themselves as African and more than 43% identify themselves as mixed race. The police violence against the Afro-Brazilian community is widespread which has led to the Black Lives Matter movement in Brazil. Bolsonaro had also been targeting the more than 300 indigenous communities of Brazil. He was planning to build hydroelectric dam projects and hyper-accelerating the deforestation of the Amazon.

According to Brazil’s National Institute for Space Research (INPE), almost 16,000 square miles of the Amazon were deforested under Bolsonaro’s presidency. His disdain for the environment and the climate crisis is well known. According to some estimates, between 17 to 20 percent of the Amazon has been destroyed

[1] <https://www.oxfam.org/en/brazil-extreme-inequality-numbers>

[2] <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v33/n07/perry-anderson/lula-s-brazil>

[3] Pahnke, A. R., & Milan, M. (2020). *The Brazilian crisis and the new authoritarianism*. *Monthly Review*, 72(2), 31-43.

[4] Michael Albertus (2018), “The Military Returns to Brazilian Politics,” *Foreign Policy*, October 8.

in the past fifty years. Saving the Amazon is imperative to address the planetary climate crisis as it produces between six and nine percent of the world's total oxygen and acts as a massive carbon sink⁵.

In his first two terms in office, Lula fought against deforestation. He has pledged to crack down on illegal mining and logging as well as to revive the Amazon Fund, which is meant to protect the rainforest.

Lula's strongest support is among the poor, rural voters in the northeast part of Brazil. PT and its allies in trade unions and social movements play a key role in political mobilization.

LULA, SOCIAL WELFARE, AND NEO-LIBERALISM

During Lula's first two terms in office, he pushed massive infrastructure programmes and direct cash transfers. Social welfare policies, falling unemployment, and increase in the minimum wage contributed to a brief period of income redistribution. He succeeded in lowering Brazil's poverty index by 20% during his two terms as president from 2003-2010.

Bolsa Família is a monthly cash transfer programme to mothers in the lowest income bracket as a reward for sending their children to school and getting their health checked. The payments are very small though – \$12 per child, or an average \$35 a month. Bolsa Família was a mere 0.5 per cent of GDP⁶.

The nature of neoliberal policies changed under Lula when he placed restrictions on private land purchases by non-Brazilian capitalists. It did not curtail foreign investment, instead, the multinational interests shifted to sectors like oil and gas. Brazil has continued to be dependent on agribusiness, oil and mining exports for foreign reserves

as well as to pay foreign debt obligations. A lot of the social welfare policies have been financed by higher revenues accruing from growth and high commodity prices. The PT has continued with the neoliberal policies and thus have not been able to address structural causes of inequality. The trade unions were 30% of the formal labour force (1980s) and that number has fallen to 17 % (2011).

The Brazilian elite and the leaders in the Congress, who were actively supporting the 2016 coup and the 2018 legal wrangling that imprisoned Lula, have congratulated him. Globally, the imperialist countries have also welcomed the result of the elections. This does not reflect any shift in their policies though, it is just an attempt to bring some socio-political stability to Brazil which was on the verge of chaos during the Bolsonaro government.

THE PATH AHEAD

Lula's presidency will hopefully bring some reprieve to Cuba and Venezuela that have been severely impacted by draconian US sanctions. It also provides an opportunity for social democratic governments in large countries such as Mexico, Colombia, Peru, and Argentina to try and build a Latin American alliance. Brazil, in Lula's previous term, had been active in BRICS and this will provide an opportunity to strengthen that forum.

Social movements, labour unions, indigenous organizations and other movements will have to build on this victory and push for progressive policies and programmes. Organizations like the Landless Rural Workers' Movement (MST) are planning to push for food sovereignty and land reforms for the landless. The trade unions will have to launch new campaigns and movements if they want to stop the decline in unionization. These movements and their achievements will shape the path forward for Brazil. ■

[5] <https://www.newsweek.com/what-lula-brazil-election-victory-means-amazon-1755732>

[6] <https://covertactionmagazine.com/2022/10/31/lula-da-silva-wins-brazilian-presidency/>

COLOMBIA: LA LUCHA CONTINUA

▲ Tamarai

Gustavo Petro and Francia Marquez of the Historic Pact Coalition made history by winning the elections in Colombia on June 19, 2022 and were elected the President and Vice-President. Rodolfo Hernandez, the opposition candidate, lost by more than 700,000 votes. When the results were announced, Francia Marquez said, "After 214 years we finally have a government of the people - a people's government, a government of people with calloused hands, a government

of ordinary people."

The Historic Pact Coalition was formed in February 2021 and as the name signifies it is a coalition of political parties and social movements like Humane Colombia, Patriotic Union formed by the Communist Party, The Commons (a political party founded by the former members of Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia-People's Army (FARC- EP), Alternative Indigenous and Social Movement, We are all Colombia and other groups belonging to the broad

left. The Historic Pact Coalition has 63/108 seats in the Senate (upper house) and 114/186 seats in the House of Representatives (lower house).

Petro who is from the Humane Colombia party was a former member of a guerilla group M-19 which was formed to fight the corrupt electoral system in Colombia, he has been a senator, a mayor and an anti-corruption activist. Marquez, the Vice-President, an Afro-Colombian and a well known environmental activist was born in a family of peasants and miners. She has worked against illegal mining and has received several death threats. Colombia is considered

the second most dangerous country in the world for environmental activists. Hernandez the defeated candidate is a former mayor, a wealthy business man who was in the construction industry. He once expressed that he was a follower of Hitler, he has been an admirer of Nayib Bukele the president of El Salvador who is implementing neoliberal reforms and has unleashed several repressive measures against labour unions and other activists.

POST ELECTION POLICIES

There have been some significant changes on the ground since the elections. On November 3, the Colombian parliament approved the "Total Peace Law". This will enable the government to undertake negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and Colombian National Liberation Army (ELN). Both these groups were founded in 1964 inspired by the Cuban revolution to fight the oppressive Colombian government supported by the USA

There has been a drastic reorientation of foreign policy with Petro urging Latin American countries to work together leaving aside their differences. "Let us understand once and for all that there is much more that unites us than what separates us and together we are stronger". The border between Colombia and Venezuela was reopened on September 26 after 7 years of its closure with a lot of jubilation from people on both sides. In 2019, Venezuela broke off diplomatic relations with Colombia when the government previously headed by Ivan Duque joined the United States in recognizing opposition leader Juan Guaido as the president of Venezuela in an effort to bring down the elected government of Nicolas Maduro. Political leaders from the ruling coalition in Colombia now are holding meetings to restore economic relations and rebuild bilateral trade.

One important undertaking by Petro's government has been to restore the ownership of the Venezuelan petrochemical company Monmeros supplying fertilizers to Colombia back to the Venezuelan government. The

U.S. puppet government of Duque (2018-2022) had handed over this public company of Venezuela to the opposition for 3 years. The U.S has many sanctions against Venezuela in place, it remains to be seen if sanctions will be imposed against Monmeros at this time. Colombia would like Monmeros to supply fertilizers at a discounted rate. Petro had said in his election campaign that one of the important tasks of his government would be to address the nationwide hunger, any decrease in fertilizer prices likely will lower the food prices which can provide immediate benefits to roughly 45% of the Colombian population living in poverty.

The government has announced meetings to discuss minimum wage with employers and workers and an agreement will be reached by December 30, 2022. Gloria Ines Ramirez a former trade union leader, prominent human rights defender and a member of the Colombian Communist Party (which is a coalition partner), has been appointed as the Labour Minister. The mainstream press has been highly critical of her open admiration for the late Hugo Chavez and his policies which had significantly improved material conditions for the poor in Venezuela.

The GDP of Colombia is around 315 billion U.S. dollars. According to the Institute of Policy Studies, 4740 individuals in Colombia had a combined net worth totaling 104 billion dollars, while representing 0.009% of the population they hold 17.3% of the country's wealth. The government is getting ready to pass a wealth tax package on January 1, 2023 that will increase annual revenue by 4 billion dollars to fund public spending measures. This was one of the electoral promises of Petro.

MULTINATIONAL COMPANIES, COCAINE TRADE, US IMPERIALISM

Colombia's history is replete with exploitation of its rich resources. The Spanish invaders in the early 16th century pillaged gold and silver. Transnational corporations after

independence from Spain working with the national bourgeoisie have extracted minerals, oil and other natural resources causing untold suffering to its people. According to the Indigenous Peoples Human Rights Commission, just between 1985 and 2017, 9148 indigenous leaders have been murdered by paramilitary organizations and others linked to the Colombian state while attempting to defend their territories. While U.S. imperialism has interfered in many countries in Latin America, Colombia has received the lion's share of military aid. The U.S. has 7 military bases in the country. Colombia is the first Latin American country to become a member of NATO, a reward for its collaboration with the U.S. The US Army in the early 1960s formulated Plan Lazo to develop paramilitary and counter-insurgency forces in Colombia to attack the many peasant autonomous committees that had sprung up in the countryside with links to the Communist Party of Colombia. These committees were mounting spirited struggles against the landed bourgeoisie and the Colombian state.

Successive governments in the U.S. led by both the Democrats and Republicans have implemented one plan after another to continue to influence the Colombian government's economic, social and political policies. Plan Colombia in 1999 was implemented with 6-9 billion dollars to be provided over a 10 year period ostensibly to stop the illegal cocaine trade. Oil companies like Occidental, Exxon-Mobil, Texaco, BP Amoco spent millions of dollars to influence U.S. policy in Colombia for counter-insurgency operations in the face of resistance from FARC and other groups who were resisting land grab and forceful eviction of peasants. In the important book 'Cocaine, Death Squads and The War on Terror', Olivar Villar and Drew Cottle write about the collusion of the Colombian state and narco traffickers. On the one hand small coca (the raw crop) farmers lands have been devastated by biological warfare as part of the 'war on drugs' while the cocaine (illegally

processed coca) cartels with links to the Colombian state and U.S. agencies have flourished with billions of dollars being laundered to Wall Street banks and financial institutions. Millions of peasants have been evicted to enable the takeover of their lands by multinational corporations for oil and mineral extraction. Canadian mineral corporations increased their assets from 30 billion dollars in 2005 to 210 billion dollars in 2015.

REPRESSION, RESISTANCE

AND ELECTORAL VICTORY

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC-EP) and the Colombian President Santos signed a peace deal in Havana in 2016 with the goal to end 50 years of civil war. Repression and attacks against

activists however did not abate. According to the Institute for Studies in Development and Peace, 930 social activists and 245 ex-combatants of FARC were assassinated after the peace accord was signed in 2016.

Colombia witnessed a massive general strike called by its major trade unions in November 2019 where 25 million participated in shutting down the country when the unpopular government of Duque tried to lower pensions and minimum wages. In April 2021, when the same government tried to pass a tax reform bill that would have increased the prices of goods, a massive movement erupted in 23 cities across Colombia and the bill was withdrawn.

The victory of the Historic Pact Coalition has brought hope and joy to

millions of poor Colombians who have been historically marginalized. This victory symbolizes their aspirations for a better future. Petro's government however faces huge challenges, the Colombian army with its long record of human rights abuses is still under the control of the right wing, the brutal paramilitary forces who have been recipients of assistance from U.S. agencies continue to be armed and all the capitalist structures remain in place. The Colombian people will need to continue to organize militant struggles against the oligarchy and their collaborators in the United States for a radical transformation of their society. As they say in Latin America "La Lucha Continua- The Struggle Continues". ■

WHY WAS CHILE'S NEW DRAFT CONSTITUTION REJECTED?

After years of consistent protests by people's movements in Chile, a new draft Constitution, with several progressive provisions, was prepared to replace the Pinochet dictatorship era Constitution. During the first referendum held in October 2022, the new draft Constitution, received more than 60% approval votes, but in the second referendum held in September 2022, the proposed text of new Constitution was rejected by a majority. Below is a note on the situation by Sergio Reyes, a social and political activist from Chile.

On October 25, 2020 Chileans had voted overwhelmingly to write a new constitution and to have a Constitutional Convention with more than 150 members, with gender parity, and reserved posts for representatives of indigenous nations. Traditional parties from right and left and their "centre" wings didn't do too well, and a new group of independent, progressive, grassroots, people made it a success. Right wings and centrists were appalled, and begun working hard to derail this process. In fact their representatives in the Convention were there just to torpedo the process. In the middle of it all there were presidential elections. On the right, a fascist, Antonio Kast, on the left, a young progressive, critical of the center left that administered the state inherited from Pinochet. Up to this point, voting in Chile was voluntary.

After a year of work, and with a new administration in The Moneda Palace, headed by Gabriel Boric, the convention finished their work, with a series of grassroots consultations, with many of these spaces also hijacked by right wings operatives and people paid to support their position. The resulting constitution proposal contained progressive language that would have changed the

system from a neoliberal capitalist system, to what I call a progressive enlightened capitalism. This included gender equality, plurinationalism, a full catalog of social rights, and environmental rights. This was too much for conservatives on the right and the center left to tolerate and they set to destroy the proposal. A key move was the rush to change voluntary participation in voting to mandatory. This added nearly 40% more people who never voted voluntarily. The majority of people did not read the constitution proposal, even though this was distributed freely by the government. Those who favored the option "Reject", planted a few slogans such as "this is a bad constitution." "They are after our money." "They will expropriate your property". "This is communism". "This will destroy our country." Yet, one the elements that was resisted the most was the concept of a "plurinational state". Chilean racism was cleverly tapped by right wing propaganda experts indicating that "Indians will be better off than us Chileans."

In the end, percentage wise the voting was reversed from a first plebiscite where more than 60% voted to change the constitution to more than 60% voting to reject the changes proposed, on the second plebiscite. Again, the apathetic non-voting sector of the population turned things around. The hard votes from the first plebiscite didn't change much. Now professional politicians have regained control of the constitutional process and are negotiating how to move forward to create a constitutional body that will probably have minor changes from Pinochet's constitution. The tide after the voting of September 4th has changed in favor of the right-wing, feeling empowered. This is then classic fascism, extreme right wing ideas in action with peoples support. ■

THE PROGRESSIVE TIDE IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE SPECTRE OF AMERICA'S NEW MONROE DOCTRINE

▲ Aishik Saha

“They have the force and will be able to dominate us, but social forces can be arrested by neither crime nor force. History is ours, and the people make history”

*-The Last Radio Broadcast
of Salvador Allende*

The defeat of Jair Bolsonaro in the recently held elections in Brazil at the hands of Lula led *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT) marks the latest and perhaps most significant victory in a chain of leftist victories in the continent that the United States has traditionally regarded as its backyard.

The long history of intervention by the US in order to install dictators overthrowing popularly elected rulers in the region has left a deep and indelible mark on the politics, economy, and history of the region. American private companies have developed entrenched interest in preserving and upholding such regimes, which in turn have facilitated their exploitative practices. Hardly a single country in the region has been untouched by American interventions.

The Monroe doctrine emerged as the United States was engaged in a genocidal war against the Native Americans and westward expansion by violating its own treaties with native tribes through what is now known as ‘Manifest Destiny’. President James Monroe in his annual address to the US Congress in 1823 articulated that the US would not tolerate European attempts to intervene in North or South America. By the emergence of the Cold War it meant that the US would not tolerate the growing influence of communism in Latin American countries.

The brutal suppression of the elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile is perhaps the most egregious example. When the internal reactionary forces in Chile failed to unleash social chaos after Allende’s election, the US took it upon itself to orchestrate a military coup that overthrew the government in 1973. This was based on the fear that a “well-functioning socialist experiment” in the region would be an inspiration across the region. Instead the Pinochet regime made Chile the home of neoliberalism, which was then unleashed across the globe.

The return of progressive governments across the Latin American region marks the return of hope as the largest country in the region marks the growing popularity of socialism among the working class.

A Neo-Monroe doctrine is shaping place in the region, with the US imperialist project battered by the debacle and withdrawal from Afghanistan and the victory of various anti-imperialist and progressive governments in Latin America. The US have been raising alarms against the growing influence of the left in Latin America and subversion of what they feel are core US interests. US Senator Ted Cruz’s recent rants against energy nationalization and demands for greater sanctions on Venezuela have gone viral. Attempts to initiate regime change in Venezuela has saw private military contractors attempt to land contingents of armed mercenaries in the country. Sanctions have also be heightened on Cuba despite international condemnation.

The Caribbean island nation of Haiti is becoming the new battleground for US imperialist forces. In an Op-ed published by the editorial board

of Washington Post, the newspaper shouts - Yes, intervene in Haiti — and push for democracy. The call is not something out of the blue. The US President Joe Biden and Canadian Prime Minister, along with the Organisation of American States (OAS) cartel had been pushing for ‘dropping democracy’ on Haitians.

Currently, Haitian capital and many areas are in the grip of violent gang-related activities. The violence, which the Core Group (composed of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, the Ambassadors of Brazil, Canada, France, Germany, Spain, the European Union, the USA, and the Special Representative of the OAS) would like to project as lack of democratic understanding in the country, is in fact the product of years of throttling democratic aspirations of the people by the criminal-oligarchy nexus backed by the Core Group itself.

The US-Core Group now wants to ‘send democracy’ in Haiti through funding, electoral meddling and rehashing the horrors of military intervention in the country. In fact, today the Caribbean nation is the largest subject to foreign actors’ constant self-insertion into internal matters. It was the same US-Core Group that helped in ousting democratically-elected president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in the 2004 coup by right-wing ex-army paramilitary units, which invaded the country from across the Dominican border. He was exiled to the Central African Republic and in 2011, the US State Department categorically asked South Africa to postpone his departure to Haiti in view of the elections.

If the US decides to send boots in Haiti, it will be the fourth official US intervention in Haiti and 470th across the globe since the 1800s. And since 1991, a new Haitian intervention will up the US imperialist card to 252 (*Military Intervention Project at Tufts University, 2022*). ■

BONDED LABOURERS FREED IN TAMIL NADU

In the western districts of Tamil Nadu, which is industrially most-developed, one can witness the rampant, indiscriminate and crude forms of exploitation, including forced labour. Based on a complaint from Chhattisgarh Adivasi organisations and trade unions in mid-October 2022, a local-unit of AICCTU and RYA intervened and ensured the release of several workers who were natives of Chhattisgarh, who were being held as bonded labourers in Namakkal district.

Comrades Subramani and Venkatesh of AICCTU, Kalidas of RYA met the district collector and filed a complaint against the migrant workers being held as bonded labourers, and sought for their immediate release and also for the protection of their life and livelihood, which included payment of wages and compensation. Based on the

information provided by AICCTU-RYA, the government task force – comprising district collector, labour and child labour protection officers – initiated action to ensure the release of 37 migrant bonded labourers on October 19th, 2022.

The migrant labourers hailing from Chhattisgarh and Odisha were forced to work in the poultry farms of Namakkal district. They were brought to Tamil Nadu by two agents from Maharashtra and were handed over to local contractors Prakash Sahu (originally from Chhattisgarh) and Thangavel.

The workers were forced to stay in a dilapidated house without any basic amenities located at a poultry farm and were forced to work for almost 19 hours every day, without any break or interval. Sometimes, they were also forced to work for 48 hours. They were not paid any wages, but were only provided with

some food for survival. The workers also suffered assault and violence at the hands of contractors, when they demanded better working conditions and wages. Their mobile phones and Aadhaar cards were also confiscated by the contractors. In this scenario, a few workers managed to escape their custody, returned to their native place and informed about the plight of the workers to local activists, including members of Adivasi Sangharsh Morcha (ASM). ASM and other activists later flagged the issue to AICCTU Tamil Nadu unit.

After their release, the Tamil Nadu government arranged for transportation to send these workers back to their native places and gave Bonded Labour Release Certificates, along with wages and compensation. The contractors, who attempted to escape, were arrested by the police and the process of recovering four months of due wages is underway.

- Chandramohan ■

ALL INDIA WORKSHOP OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS

The All India Construction Workers Federation (AICWF) held its first ever all-India workshop at Ranchi on November 9th and 10th, 2022 in the backdrop of the Modi-led BJP government's increasing attacks on the working class, including the introduction of Labour Codes, dismantling of welfare boards, etc. Construction workers constitute a single largest contingent of workforce, next only to agriculture, in the country. But, they are the most neglected lot without any real legal protection. They work without any job security, wage security or social security. Longer working hours without any overtime payment, casual nature of employment, etc., affect them very badly. They often fall prey to occupational hazards and diseases, including lung/respiratory related disease and cancer. In the absence of any safety precautions, the number of workers who have lost their lives while on duty is countless. The availability of data in this respect is rare and instances highly under-reported. A 2019 study by IIT Delhi says that around 48,000 people die at work in

India every year, out of which, 70 per cent are construction workers. In such cases, unfortunately, neither the building owner, nor the builder or contractors are held responsible. Workers are forced to mend for themselves.

There are endless categories of construction workers in terms of their trade or profession. They are generally organised based on labour corners or localities. Their plight should also be understood through their employment and workplace in order to formulate the strategy to organise them. Workers employed in government owned infrastructure projects such as construction of dams, roads, etc., workers engaged in private-owned larger projects, workers engaged in quarries and brick kilns, workers engaged in emerging industries like ready-mix concrete manufacturing, migrant workers, workers employed in small-scale construction activities and wage earners like electricians, plumbers, etc., were identified as major sections of the construction workforce.

SOME MAJOR CHANGES IN LAWS

The paper on existing laws, Codes and implications for construction workers was presented by Comrade Balasubramanian. The Code on Social Security contemplates formation of a single welfare board at the state-level for all categories of unorganised workers by dismantling several welfare boards that exist now. Its welfare functions are restricted to the lowest. The provision of mandatorily providing basic amenities and rest rooms are completely relaxed and is now left to the discretion of the employers.

A construction worker was basically defined by their nature of employment. Now, the construction activities worth less than Rs. 50 lakhs are exempted from the definition of "Building and Construction Work" and thus workers employed in such projects are denied the application of relevant laws. In addition, a threshold of 10 and 20 numbers are introduced for application of labour laws. For example, workers are entitled to ESI only if more than 10 workers are employed and are entitled to PF only if more than 20 workers are employed. With these changed thresholds that provide legal protection to workers, a vast majority of construction workers will be removed from the purview of labour laws.

Henceforth, as per the new labour code, only a worker engaged in a project that employs more than 10 workers in the previous 12 months will be considered to be a construction worker. This change in definition is a major blow to the workers.

SOME ASPECTS OF CONSTRUCTION WORKERS' UNIONISATION

Comrade Shankar emphasised on the need to struggle for the expansion of welfare benefits; to organise against the nexus of real estate mafia, bureaucrats, builders and contractors; to hold the owners of the construction, builders and contractors responsible for any death or disablement while on duty and also for the welfare; and to organise struggles of construction workers against the policies of the central and state governments, for decent wages, better living and working conditions, proper housing and for the dignity of workers. He also pointed out a greater need to integrate the construction workers' movement with the struggles of

migrant workers and all other workers in urban areas.

He called for an intense and widespread campaign against saffron fascism and Modi government that is snatching away all rights of construction workers and to defeat the BJP in 2024 General Elections.

Inaugurating the workshop, Comrade Rajiv Dimri, the General Secretary of AICCTU, said that the Codes are being imposed upon the working class by the Modi government and this will soon do away with the 'Building and Other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act 1996'. The repealing of this Act will lead to the closure of all BOCW Boards across 36 states in the country. In fact, the Code on Social Security is a direct blow on construction workers. He called upon union members to organise construction workers in large numbers and to resist

Modi government and its anti-worker policies.

Around 65 cadres from Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Puducherry, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi participated in the workshop. Changing composition and challenges of construction workers movement, changing laws and the newer issues and politicisation of the construction labour movement were the three major topics.

Comrades SK Sharma, the General Secretary of the Federation, Balasubramanian, the President and Comrade Shankar, AICCTU President were the resource persons, while Comrade RN Thakur introduced the subjects. Comrade Subhendu Sen, the general secretary of AICCTU, Jharkhand, also addressed the workshop.

-SK Sharma ■

AZAMGARH AIRPORT COMES AT A HUGE COST TO WOMEN AND RURAL POOR

Report of from the fact-finding team comprised of Dr. Muneeza Khan from Centre for Justice and Peace (CJP), Kusum Verma and Dhanshila Devi from All India Progressive Womens' Association (AIPWA) and Ramji Yadav and Aparna Yadav, editors of the magazine, Gaon Ke Log.

The Yogi government has declared an ambitious project of the extension of Manduri airstrip in Azamgarh district of eastern Uttar Pradesh, into a national-international airport. About 670 acre of fertile agricultural land is to be acquired for this purpose out of which 360 acre of land has already been surveyed. This project will affect 45,000 people in eight gram sabhas and nearly 4000 houses would be demolished for the planned airport.

On 12 October 2022, the sub-divisional magistrate and the local police entered Jamua-Hariram village, to carry out the land survey without giving any prior notice to the villagers. The village populations is mostly made up of Dalits and OBCs. When the locals, particularly the women protested, the officials abused the people with casteist slurs and went back. They returned again in the night with additional police force but with no women police with them. This time they attacked the

villagers and injured many. Sunita, a poor labourer was grievously injured and had to lose her daily wages for the next few days. Prabha Devi (40) narrated that she fell in a paddy field when the police hit her on her thighs.

When the women of this village were asked if they complained against the police action, they retorted, "When the police and the government officials are themselves beating us, to whom should we complain?" Some villagers reported that they had earlier met the District Magistrate of Azamgarh about the land acquisition, who only warned them against obstructing government work or face punishment under NSA (National Security Act).

The barbaric incident of 12-13 October galvanized the locals into action and from the same day they started a sit-in near the primary school of village Kheria. Calling themselves the 'Land-House Struggle Committee', the protest

sees participation of hundreds of locals from the affected areas who join the sit-in everyday between 2-6 pm. The participation of women in the protest is noteworthy. Ranjita Kumari, a student of Class XI and a regular participant of the sit-in said, "I dream of getting higher education and a job. If this land acquisition is successful, my home will be demolished. I will not be able to study further. Modiji appeals to the public to plant trees on Environment Day but when our fertile land and trees are destroyed for this airport, will not the environment suffer?" The representative of the village Pradhan of Jamua-Hariram, Manoj Yadav informed the fact-finding team that they had not received any official document from the government till date regarding the ongoing land survey or acquisition. He added that if the government wants to develop the economy and build an airport, they should use barren land instead of displacing villagers from their residential and agricultural land.

The Land-House Struggle Committee is led by Rajeev Yadav, a social activist. On being questioned about the future of the movement and the challenges ahead, he said that the local unit of Samyukt Kisan Morcha was firmly supporting the protest. Not only people from the state but from across the country are supporting the movement and Medha

Patkar (Narmada Bachao Movement) and farmer leader Rakesh Tikait had visited the sit-in to offer their support. Another local leader, Ramnayan Yadav said that women who had rarely ventured out of their village are now the staunchest supporters of this movement and their large presence in the ongoing sit-in proves this. The resistance offered by the locals has pushed back the police and they have not dared to enter the

village again. He added, "We believe in the law of the land and will fight to defend our land and the Constitution."

On the basis of the interactions with the affected people, the fact-finding team was of the opinion that (a) the perpetrators of the police atrocity on the innocent locals and women of Jamua-Hariram village should be booked as per law. A high-level judicial enquiry into the incidents of the intervening night of 12-13 October

should be conducted. (b) 670 acre of fertile land and thousands of houses would be destroyed by the proposed airport. This project is therefore anti-people and anti-environment. This model of economic development of the government is in fact a model for human and environmental destruction. The proposed Mandura Airstrip extension plan should be scrapped.

- Kusum Verma ■

LAKHIMPUR-KHERI RISES AGAIN

THIS TIME AGAINST EVICTIONS

Lakhimpur-Kheri district of Uttar Pradesh was in the news in September 2021 after farmers were crushed by the speeding jeep driven by the son of BJP leader and Minister of State for Home Affairs Ajay Mishra Teni. This incident created an uproar across the country and ultimately, the killer son of the Minister was arrested. This time, another farmers' movement is brewing in the district and against the attempts of the Yogi government to evict farmers from land spread over 975 acre, and on which about 1,700 families depend on for their livelihood. In fact, a notice has been served on these farmers by the Forest Department and the District Administration asking them to vacate the land and preventing them from harvesting the paddy and sugarcane crops which has already been sown in this area by the farmers.

Post independence and until the 1960s, a large number of farmers from Eastern UP and Punjab had migrated to this area and began farming as a form of livelihood, in what was then a barren piece of land. This land has now been converted into one of the most fertile lands in UP and witnesses a great production of sugarcane. Before independence, this land is said to have been owned by the king of Oyal state, to whom the farmers

paid rent. Later, the king transferred the land to the Forest Department, without the knowledge of the farmers who were tilling the land. However, in 2018, during Yogi 1.0 regime, thousands of farmers were served with notice of eviction from their lands, which included about 1,700 families in the Mudha Buzurk Gram Panchayat, along with farmers from other villages.

Over the past few months, the officials of the Forest Department had been asking the farmers not to sow paddy on their lands and were even putting pressure on the local sugarcane mill owners not to buy sugarcane from these farmers during the crushing season. This had created a lot of unrest and resentment against the government among the farmers.

The culmination of the present protest of the farmers was the incident on November 6th 2022, when the son of a farmer in the area, who was transporting sugarcane to a crushing unit, was stopped by the officials of the forest department who then confiscated the trolley, threw away the sugarcane and later arrested two boys on fabricated charges of loading timber. This incident further infuriated the farmers, who then began an indefinite fast from November 13th, under the banner of All India Kisan

Mahasabha, supported by members of the Bharatiya Kisan Union.

Incidentally, the High Court of Allahabad had granted an order of stay, which is also being violated by the officials of the Forest Department. When the administration took no notice of the indefinite fast, the farmers decided to organise a protest march to the office of the Nighasan Tehsil on November 17th. Thousands of farmers participated in the 15-km long march, carrying red flags. The administration was taken aback by the strength and solidarity of the farmers during the March.

Thereafter, a delegation of leaders met the administration with their demands and the administration assured them that status-quo would be maintained on the land and a meeting with the farmer leaders, forest officials and civil administration would be held in the coming few days. The farmers were also assured that they would not be stopped from selling their sugarcane.

The main demands of the farmers were for the release of confiscated tractor-trolley, unconditional release of the arrested boys, legal action against the policemen who misused their power to arrest the innocent boys, to uphold the rights of the farmers on their lands and to put an end to the harassment faced by farmers.

- Jai Prakash Narayan ■

JAMMU DISTRICT CONFERENCE OF CPIML

Jammu district conference of CPIML was held on 13 November. Comrade Rajiv Dimri was the central observer of the conference. Comrade Nirdosh Uppal welcomed delegates and guests in the open session where he elaborated on

the party's work in Jammu & Kashmir along with the national situation. Comrade Sukhdarshan Natt, central committee member, greeted the conference as a guest. Shubham Kaul representing the displaced Kashmiri Pandits from the valley addressed the

open session where he criticised BJP's double talks doing more harm to the residents of the valley, KP community in particular. He expressed confidence in CPIML's stand on Kashmir and hoped that the party would continue to assert for justice and political resolutions to the problems of the people of J&K. Leader of Nature Human Centred Lok Lahar comrade Roop Chand

appreciated stands on issues pertaining to environment and expressed his desire to work in coordination with CPIML. Many prominent trade union leaders of Jammu also greeted the conference.

Comrade Subhash Mehta presented the report on the political situation in the delegate session. Comrade Sunil Salyan presented the organisational report. He also apprised of the organisational situation in other districts of J&K including districts like Sambha, Udhampur, Riyasi, Kishtawad and Shrinagar.

Comrade Rajiv Dimri called for building up strong political initiatives against fascism and to work for making the forthcoming party congress of CPIML a great success.

The conference elected a 9-member District committee with comrade Subhash Mehta as its Secretary and concluded after taking resolutions regarding organising workers, peasants, youth and common people against the exploitation of big corporations, intensifying struggles

against communal fascism and terrorism, for restoring the statehood of J&K as it was and establishing an elected government, to struggle for socio-economic development of the state, to unite democratic and secular parties and organisations on a single platform for intensifying the struggle for political and democratic rights to all in the state, and to work towards administrative, judicial and political reforms in the state.

– Sukhdarshan Singh Natt ■

RATNAGIRI REFINERY: PEOPLE'S RESISTANCE TO DEFEND LAND, LIVELIHOOD AND ENVIRONMENT

The Ratnagiri Refinery and Petrochemical Project, mooted in 2014 by the Modi government and the BJP-Shiv Sena government of Maharashtra, was touted as Asia's biggest oil refinery. It was supposed to be a joint venture involving three Indian PSUs - Indian Oil, HPCL and BPCL – and Saudi Arabia's Aramco and United Arab Emirates' National Oil Company.

The project was proposed to be located at Nanar over a vast area of 200 square km. While land-grabbers, speculators and BJP leaders keen on expanding the party's presence in Konkan region lapped up the project idea, local people started protesting against the project. They had very valid concerns as the area is already replete with several major plants and the environment has been taking a heavy toll.

Beginning with the Tarapur nuclear power plant set up in 1969 umpteen numbers of projects have come up on the creeks along the coast, polluting the air and discharging their hazardous effluents in the creeks without treatment.

It is instructive to look at the scale of environmental havoc to understand the opposition of the people. Dahanu Thermal Plant, the Tarapur NPP, The Boisar and Palghar MIDCs with many chemical units, new port at Vadhvan in Palghar district, are all on the creeks. The Thane Creek and the Kalyan creek have a series of chemical plants in

Ambarnath, Dombivali, Vasai, Virar and other adjoining MIDCs. The Thane creek gets polluted by numerous small and medium scale chemical and petro chemical units besides Tata's power plant, the BARC. On the Mumbai Goa Highway, we have Mahad MIDC, the notorious and infamous Lote Parshuram MIDC, Enron plant, Jindal Power, Proposed Jaitapur NPP, Finolex plant and the Reddy mines, all situated on creeks and polluting them., A Pharma Park is also being proposed on the Roha creek.

All these projects have wreaked havoc with the environment, causing immense water and air pollution, destroyed local livelihood chain and caused massive displacement and dispossession of the people. Each project has therefore witnessed prolonged protests right since the preliminary stages with more and more people feeling the adverse impact.

In the face of growing opposition of the people, the Shiv Sena insisted on the scrapping of the project and ahead of the 2019 elections, the BJP had to accept the Shiv Sena demand and the project was scrapped. But with the BJP coming back to power by splitting the Shiv Sena, the Shinde-Phadnavis government has now announced its intent to revive the project. Earlier, the Uddhav Thackeray government had suggested downsizing the project and relocating it at the Barsu- Solgaon-Devache Ghotane area north of the old site adjacent to the Jaitapur project.

But the Shinde government wants to revive the original project idea.

Irked by the experience of the various political parties during the Jaitapur and Nanar struggles, the anti-project agitation is being led by a committee formed by the local population called the "Barsu Solgaon Panchkroshi Refinery Virodhi Sanghatana". Back in power, the BJP and MNS are aggressively pushing the project. The Ranee are openly threatening the activists. Uday Samant, the local MLA, who was earlier with Shiv Sena and hence opposed the project at Nanar, has joined the new government and has been put in charge of the Industries after he met with Amit Shah at Delhi. The people have not yet allowed any survey and ground testing to be conducted. In the local gram panchayat elections, the Sanghatana fielded its own candidates and won defeating the SS, BJP candidates.

The BJP-Shinde government is now trying to threaten the people by attacking the leadership with notices for externment and conducting flag marches by a joint contingent of armed RAF and local police forces. Fadanvis is talking about the need to establish a Petrochemical Ecosystem while the lumpenized local leadership are busy terrorising the people into submission. But the Sanghatana stands firm in opposition, with women leading the struggle. They are determined not to allow any survey, either physical or by drones.

The battle lines are thus clearly drawn and a powerful resistance is taking shape.

- Ajit Patil ■

7TH NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ALL INDIA AGRICULTURAL AND LABOUR ASSOCIATION

When the toiling poor begin to ask for their share from the people of the world, it won't be a field, or a country, it will be the whole wide world. Quoting Faiz Ahmed Faiz's well known *tarana*, *Hum mehnatkash jagwaalon se*, CPIML General Secretary, Dipankar Bhattacharya, at the inaugural session of AIARLA's 7th National Conference exhorted the rural workers to claim the world. He encouraged AIARLA, in its role as a large organization of the rural poor, to take on big struggles, to realize all the rights of the rural poor. The rural poor today face threats to their life and livelihood, while the government has been busy playing divisive politics of hate to support its corporate allies. The 7th National Conference, held at Kanailal Datta, Rashbehari Bose- Nazrul Islam Nagar (Chandannagar), Hooghly, West Bengal on 14- 15th November 2022, hence began with the call to, 'Resist Bulldozer Raj, Resist Communal Fascism'. Seven hundred thirty-one delegates from across the country participated in the conference. Membership has grown among dalits, adivasis, landless poor, rural women, migrant workers, brick kiln-coal picking workers, MNREGA workers, forest producers, scheme workers and seasonal workers. The core issues of mobilization have been land rights, food rights, shelter-homestead land, education, wage, health, Covid relief and social dignity.

INAUGURAL SESSION

The first day started with a march through the town. Fraternal organizations and other allies of the rural workers' movement addressed the open session. Amiya Patra expressed solidarity on behalf of AIAWU and called for sharing ideas and taking up united struggles on issues of agricultural workers. Environmentalist Biswajeet Mukherjee of Legal Aid Centre, highlighted the need for legislation for inter-state migrant workers. He said the dearth of data with labour departments, and the silence of State and Centre denies security and justice to workers. Swapan Ganguly of Pachimbanga Khetmojur Samiti, pointed to the crisis faced by NREGA workers in West Bengal who have not received their wages for one year, as Centre has washed its hands off by claiming corruption. He proposed joint struggles to get the wages of the workers. BKMU sent its solidarity message through Tapan Ganguly.

Comrade Dipankar noted that whatever constitutional provisions exist, they are still waiting to be realized. It was only through intense battles that rural poor won their right to sit on a cot or the right to vote and

which eventually led to election of their representative, Comrade Rameshwar Prasad, the Honorary President of AIARLA, as a member of parliament. Comrade Shashi Yadav of AIPWA and Scheme Workers federation highlighted that there are about 1 crore Asha, Anganwadi, Mid-day meal and Mamta workers, of which most are rural women. She said, "They are at the front of implementing all government schemes yet they are neither considered as workers nor employees when it comes to giving them a wage and salary." She said the women have to be mobilised as rural workers and also given leadership roles in the economic and political struggles. Solidarity was extended on behalf of AISA, RYA and AIKMS by Comrade Nilashish Basu, Comrade Neeraj and Comrade Shiv Sagar Sharma respectively.

DELEGATE SESSION

The delegates at the organizational session deliberated on the impact of international issues posed by Ukraine war, promise indicated by rise of Left in Brazil against resource plundering rightist governments. Solidarity was expressed towards movements for democracy, freedom, gender equality and rights of minorities, tribal, dalits, women and trade unions, against corporate occupation, and struggles to save nature and earth.

Income inequality, growing hunger and indebtedness, loss of employment and health crisis during Covid period and lockdown emerged as common concerns from across the country. Inflation of basic items has reduced the consumption of the rural poor. Struggles of adivasis and dalits for their rights have been subjected to violent attacks ever since the rise of Modi government. MNREGA scheme for rural labourers is on the verge of dying today because of Central government surrendering its role in employment generation. Dalit rights violation have become rampant and violence on Dalit women and girls have increased and even registering cases of harassment have become big struggles. Organized attacks and crimes against tribals, and their eviction from forests and land, have also increased under the Modi government. The Bharat Bandh called on April 2, 2018, against the BJP government's conspiracy to weaken the SC/ST Act 1989 was historic and AIARLA fully participated in making it a success along with other organisations. The biggest threat to adivasis are emerging from government's pro-corporate policies. The FRA-2002 is meant to dilute the Forest Rights Act and the PESAA-2013 which will make it difficult for traditional forest dwellers to settle their rights through gram sabha. The history of the tribal revolts is an inspiration for resistance and also a warning to the grabbers of their ancestral

land and forests. The Conference concluded with a march invoking Birsa Munda's historic revolution on 15th November and burning of the copies of the proposed act. The work among tribal persons is focused in states like Jharkhand, Odisha, Gujarat, West Bengal and certain areas of Andhra Pradesh on questions of forest, land and water. In Bihar there is work among the tribal groups in Champaran, Jamui, Purnia, Katihar, Araria etc. In West Bengal, the education-cultural questions of tribal people have been regularly raised. There have been many popular movements against corporate encroachment on land and forests and wherever such movements are going on AIARLA has expressed militant solidarity towards them. The struggles against MNREGA had peaked after the previous conference. Successful agitations have been held at many places in Bihar and Bengal for organizing and getting work on demand, increasing wages and timely payments. In many districts of Bihar, separate committees were formed after holding conferences of MNREGA workers. The movement in the future, is likely to focus on dilution of the original scheme, increasing use of machines, harassment of workers through digitization and photography twice a day at the workplace, non-payment of minimum wages. During Covid lockdown, AIARLA was the first organization to demand bringing laborers home safely at government expense. A 24-hour fast was organized across the country and demands made for lump sum assistance ten thousand rupees for all families of rural laborers, migrant workers and rural poor. Dismal situation of isolation centers was highlighted and facilitates demanded. A massive struggle on the Bihar border at Siwan led to migrant workers, stopped there, in being admitted to their state with respect, Buses were provided by the administration following the agitation and AIARLA played a big role in providing relief where none had reached across the country.

Movements against eviction of dalit settlements have gained in Bihar and against displacement targeting Muslims in Assam. A nationwide campaign demanding loan waiver, lowering of interest rate and punishing the micro finance companies for their harassment has gained ground in the Covid period. The indebtedness caused by the companies have led to large participation by women in these movements. Efforts of Punjab's AIARLA units have led to organisational expansion in many districts and pressure was created on the government to issue a directive that stopped the extortion by the companies. Similar initiatives have been taken in Assam. Programmes have been held in UP, Bihar, West Bengal and other states against indebtedness causes by micro finance companies. A number of women activists and leaders have emerged in this period. Demands for electricity for dalit poor, reduction in tariff as well as withdrawal of arrears and cases filed against rural poor

have seen participation in large numbers in UP and Bihar. Dhirender Jha, the General Secretary of AIARLA said that by bringing to the forefront the social-political role of dalits and poor, pro-corporate development model will be challenged. By sharpening the housing rights of rural poor, AIARLA will counter the bulldozer Raj of the government. He said movements for expanding food security, will counter the growing hunger and malnutrition in the country. The declining social and community networks in the rural society has made the elderly vulnerable and universal pension is the need of the time. As National Educational Policy 2020 is likely to increase the disparities in education, AIARLA will take on the battle for equitable education. He said the MNREGA must make provisions for a decent living wage and Panchayat institutions will become a focus of these struggles. Atrocities against dalits and harassment of women will be given a resounding response by organizing people's resistance.

A National Executive of 79 and National Council of 205 members was constituted. Rameshwar Prasad will be the patron, Sriram Chaudhary the Honorary President. Bihar MLA Satydev Ram has been elected the President and Dhirender Jha reelected as the General Secretary of the organization.

ADOPTED RESOLUTIONS

1. We recognize B.R Ambedkar's analysis of caste as a division of labourers and oppose the attempt of Modi government to promote casteism in society. The EWS reservation upheld by the Supreme Court affirms Modi government's reservation of 10% quota for forward castes. This violates the principles of social justice that is behind the original provisioning of Reservation for constitutionally recognised groups like SC, ST and OBCs. The judgement is on the basis of excluding these groups from the 10% quota. Reservation is not a poverty

alleviation method, for which employment and wages have to be improved, on which Modi government has completely failed.

2. AIARLA exhorts its members and public to rise against growing hunger and rural indebtedness. The deaths brought on by indebtedness are signs of the government's failure to control inflation and impoverishment of rural poor. The Global Hunger Index places India among worse off countries and the steady fall in the rankings establish that this government is playing with the lives of children of rural poor who are wasting, stunting and becoming increasingly malnourished. Child mortality caused by this negligence of the government anguishes the delegates and we are determined to mobilise against this enforced ill- health, malnourishment and deaths.

3. We are determined to mobilize against unchecked inflation and increasing unemployment levels that is forcing people to reduce basic consumption. The government instead of acting upon the price-rise and unemployment is further promoting inequality by bringing policies to enrich its corporate allies.

4. The scams in teacher appointment in Bengal has got exposed and the education minister Partha Chatterjee of TMC has also got jailed. However, the main issue of teacher appointments has been put in cold storage. We demand that education of the rural poor should not be scuttled and teachers and staff be appointed in a transparent manner at the earliest.

5. AIARLA condemns the dilution and distortion of MNREGA by the Modi government and various state governments by reducing budgetary provisions, non- provisions of wages in time and not offering work to those seeking it in this time of rising prices and unemployment. We recognize this as an act

against the Right to life and livelihood of the rural poor and will mobilize for immediate payment of wages at the completion of each day's work, 200 days of work and Rs. 700 daily wages. The government cannot enrich its allies while denying the rural poor even survival rights.

6. We exhort the people to rise in unity against the trampling of life, livelihood, dignity, wages, education, employment of dalits and adivasis. We will organize and agitate against Modi government's attempt to establish Manuwad. We will resist violation of dalit women and atrocities against Dalits and Adivasis.

7. We recognize more than one crore women engaged in implementing scheme of the government as employees and workers of the government, who are being denied minimum wages. Most of these women are rural workers and we will mobilise them to achieve their economic rights.

8. We the delegates of AIARLA endorse the Sanyukt Kisan Morcha's call to demonstrate before governor houses and ensure guarantee of MSP of grains and all agro products. We recognize that the government policies to corporatise farming is to further snatch away the bargaining power of agricultural labour/work which has been attained after many struggles.

9. We are anguished at the death of innocent migrant workers in Kashmir. This is an outcome of the complete failure of Modi Shah's policy which has taken over the state and made into union territories abrogated article 370 and created a vicious atmosphere of distrust among local population. The lives of migrant worker are not fodder to play politics by the central government. We demand that migrant workers' dignity, safety and social security be ensured through a central legislation. ■

THE ROOTS OF RISHI: UK'S RICHEST EVER PM

▲ UK correspondent

In one of his first messages to Narendra Modi, Rishi Sunak promised to deepen the 'security, defence and economic partnership' between UK and India, and on 16th November, as expected, after a meeting with Modi, he agreed 3000 visas to UK for Indian nationals. This is clearly a prelude to the signing of a trade deal which has been condemned by both British and Indian trade unions for its likely impact on labour rights. As the diplomatic relationship deepens, so apparently does Sunak's personal closeness to the RSS. While in Britain he has gone out of his way to publicly promote his identity as primarily a devout Hindu, over and above any Indianness, recently his mother-in-law Sudha Murthy was caught on camera touching the

feet of RSS activist Sambhaji Rao Bhide, one of the men booked for instigating violence in Bhima Koregaon in 2018. But Sunak is not simply another Modi-loving UK politician, like MPs Barry Gardiner and Bob Blackman (Barry bhai and Bob bhai to their Sanghi constituents), both recipients of the Padma Shree. He is fascistic in his own right. As the richest man in the UK's Parliament, twice as rich as King Charles, with an eye-wateringly expensive education in private schools followed by Oxford, and the investment bank and financial services company Goldman Sachs, he has imbibed the superiority of the upper echelons of British society with its sheer contempt for those without wealth and privilege.

He amassed enormous personal wealth during the financial crash, at a time when 300,000 people are estimated to have died in the UK as a result of the government's austerity policies. As the UK's Chancellor, he axed a £20-a-week increase to Universal Credit welfare benefits that had helped some of the poorest families through the pandemic. Just weeks before the cut was confirmed in July, he was busy planning a private swimming pool, gym and tennis court at the Yorkshire mansion which he and his wife, Akshata Murty, purchased for £1.5m in 2015. Akshata, of course, has substantial shares in Infosys, the corporate owned by her billionaire father Narayana Murthy, husband of Sudha.

As Adam Bychawski writes , the Sunaks' Georgian mansion, where locals described attending parties with liveried staff pouring champagne from magnums, is not the

only property they own. There is also the £7m, five-bedroom house in Kensington, west London; a flat, also in Kensington, that the couple reportedly keep “just for visiting relatives”; and an apartment in Santa Monica, California. Meanwhile the couple’s wealth was stashed away in the Cayman Islands.

No wonder then that Sunak boasted to his natural allies, the privileged upper-classes of Tunbridge Wells, that he was already in the process of taking away resources which the Labour party had allocated to the deprived inner city areas (a large proportion of whose residents are Asians) and diverting them to the well-heeled residents of the leafy suburbs.

In fact while celebrated as the UK’s first Asian Prime Minister, and a symbol of the Conservative party’s ‘diversity’, Sunak is no friend of people of colour. He has promised to increase the racist and violent Stop and Search policies which target Black people and Muslims, and is happy to repeat the racist and far right rhetoric about Muslims grooming children, vowing to ‘not going to let political correctness stand in the way’. He has also promised to ‘refocus’ the PREVENT anti-extremism programme (discredited for its blatant Islamophobia) on ‘Islamic extremism’ and away from the far-right extremism which is a major threat in Britain while making ‘the vilification of the United Kingdom’ into an official definition of extremism. On the question of refugees, not only has he embraced Priti Patel’s policy of sending refugees to a life-threatening existence in Rwanda, but has appointed the even more right-wing Suella Braverman as Home Secretary. In less than a month of her appointment Braverman has overseen developments more horrendous than anything Priti Patel could boast of - some 4000 asylum seekers including young children have been incarcerated at the Manston detention centre, in accommodation meant for 1600 people. Detainees are held in tents despite the biting cold weather. They have faced

not only physical and sexual violence but outbreaks of norovirus, scabies and diphtheria. As Devyani Prabhat writes ‘the situation at Manston is not just dismal, it is a violation of legal requirements in international law, domestic law and the government’s own policies’

Through all this Sunak has defended Braverman or remained silent, even when, the day after a white supremacist bombed an immigration centre in Dover, Braverman chose to call the arrival of desperate and vulnerable asylum seekers an ‘invasion’. While this use of violent militaristic language against refugees is reminiscent of Amit Shah’s tirades against migrants, in Britain it is usually the preserve of white supremacists - Nigel Farage and those further to Farage’s right. Britain First, arguably the largest of Britain’s far right groups, for example, have been conducting beach ‘patrols’ in a so-called ‘Operation White Cliffs’ to turn away asylum seekers. Significantly, when Braverman finally deigned to visit Manston, a two-hour journey from London by car, she chose to travel in a Chinook army helicopter. With his father in law’s corporate Infosys involved in substantial investments in Israel which are co-directed by Uri Levine, formerly of Israeli Military Intelligence Unit 8200, Sunak makes no bones about his closeness to Israel. He supports the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and has vowed to legislate against the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

Meanwhile, despite Biden’s recent attempts at détente with Xi, Sunak has proclaimed that China poses a systemic challenge to UK values and represents the “biggest state-based threat to our economic security”. Not surprisingly, the meeting with Xi at the G20 has been called off at short notice. In future G20 meetings Rishi will have the company and guidance of his mother-in-law and other RSS friends, because in an astonishing move, the Modi regime has quietly appointed its own supporters to represent India’s ‘civil society’

during India’s incoming presidency of the G20, with anyone else who might represent civil society completely excluded. Modi’s so-called ‘civil society’ group is chaired by Amrithanandamayi, a godwoman who stands accused of shocking sexual and physical violence against disciples at her ashram, and includes Sudha Murthy and a number of prominent RSS leaders.

Back home in Britain, Rishi Sunak is likely to also give a boost to the attempts by the Hindu fascists to label any criticism of the Modi regime or its British branches as ‘Hinduphobia’. A trend over the last 15 years has been for the outposts of the Indian government to desperately try ‘to obscure’ the genocidal Hindutva policies of the Modi government; particularly as attention to this in the Western media and public sphere has gradually increased.

Hinduphobia has been compared to ‘White Lives Matter’, a white supremacist, racist response to the Black Lives Matter movement, which has grown into a neo-Nazi movement of its own. The key idea behind ‘Hinduphobia’ – that the Hindu majority in India are under systemic attack from minorities – is akin to this casting of white people in a Western context. Both are used as an excuse for, and in response to resistance against, racist and fascist attacks on minority communities and marginalised people. Last month’s march through Leicester’s Asian communities by masked and armed Hindutva forces was aimed at provoking a response from Muslims in order to strengthen just this narrative of Hinduphobia. Already since then, pro-Hindutva groups have been exposed sharing fake posters claiming to call on Muslims to violently protest outside a Hindu temple in Wembley, North London. No such protest was planned. With Sunak as Prime Minister these forces will be emboldened to whip up communal violence in other parts of the UK. It must be resisted. ■

MANAGER PANDEY: SEARCH FOR LIGHT IN THE DARK TIMES

▲ Awadhesh

“**L**iterary criticism is an important tool of ideological struggle in times of intense class struggle in the capitalist social system. Writers and critics who serve the interests of the ruling classes have made such use of criticism and the weapons of criticism have also been used by writers and critics fighting against the ideological dominance of

the ruling classes.” Manager Pandey observed this in the process to understand the struggles of Muktibodh, but these lines also provide an insight into Manager Pandey’s struggle in the field of literary criticism as well. Developing literary criticism as a means of ideological struggle is the key contribution of Manager Pandey. In his work, realism, historical vision, and ideology form such an organic triad at the level of perception and paradigm that if there is any inconsistency in one, it automatically reflects in the other two.

On November 6, 2022, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Professor, a stalwart of Hindi literary criticism, and ex-President of Jan Sanskriti Manch, Manager Pandey, passed away. He was

81. He had authored/edited over 30 books, out of which some were translated into other Indian languages. Manager Pandey was born on September 23, 1941, in Lohti village, Gopalganj district of Bihar.

Manager Pandey's critical writings are spread over a period spanning almost five decades. We can examine and understand these writings as a long debate in Hindi literary criticism or as a serious critical struggle. The question is, with whom is this debate or struggle, and which questions and values or paradigms do they aim to establish? Manager Pandey advocated historic vision, ideology, and realism in his entire work. He emphasised the relationship of literature with mass movements and underlined the need to examine the literature in the midst of market, power, and social relations. His work never allows forgetting that literature is a form of resistance. His work on Sociology of Literature and Culture, Politics of Criticism, Sociology of Criticism, Contemporary context of cultural discussions, challenges of Bhasha languages in the era of the cultural onslaught of imperialism and fascism, concept of class in literature, and identity literature of women, Dalits, tribal, minority groups- performed the continuous task of interpreting from a historical materialistic point of view. Manager Pandey was not a seeker of non-dialectical harmony which is why his criticism not just takes the form of dialogue or discussion but also the form of serious debate or ideological struggle.

To understand the importance of Manager Pandey's ideological struggle, let us remember the contemporary circumstances. The monopolistic dominance of the US Empire after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the rise of fascist communal forces in India, the mobilization of ethnic and regional identities and power sharing, and the ambivalence of postmodernity at the level of world ideology – these were largely the circumstances that shaped the debates on literature and culture since the 1990s. In the field of literary thought, these situations presented the most serious challenge ever in front of concepts like historic vision, ideology, and reality. There was strong opposition to these concepts even during the Cold War. But with the socialist project in jeopardy, the biggest crisis for these concepts was yet to come. It was a scene of slippage, migration, surrender, and also of intellectual despair. Not only in Hindi, but also in other languages, all the thinkers and intellectuals of the left camp were retreating from their ideological commitments, doubting their works of decades, and apologizing. In those difficult times, Manager Pandey further sharpened the weapons of criticism and took a stand against post-modern ideology and the declarations of the end of history and ideology. He raised the flag of anti-imperialism/fascism and anti-feudalism to a new height in the environment of adverse intellectual power balance.

At a personal level, a situation which could have broken any person also occurred at this period of his life. His innocent son was killed by the police in Bihar. It was during this period that he also took charge of becoming the president of Jan Sanskriti Manch. He understood that he was not alone. With him were not just Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Franz Fanon, Muktibodh, D.D. Kosambi, and Jyotiswarup Saxena, but there was a whole tradition of cultural resistance in the intellectual world and by imbibing it hundreds of other fellow companions, young intellectuals too, who were looking for a new direction. It was at this juncture that he took the leadership of Jan Sanskriti Manch and led it from the front.

The preface of the book titled "In spite of the crisis" (Sankat ke Bavjood) written in 1997, in the midst of the cold darkness of the passing twentieth century, is an excellent document of the foresight, awareness, and historical vision of an Indian-Hindi intellectual. At the top of the foreword is Raymond Williams' quote, "We can learn no less from bad times than we can from good times". Manager Pandey did not consider the crisis of the past 20th century to be limited only to the defeat of socialism and the victory of capitalism. In

his eyes, this crisis was much deeper and wider. He wrote in the same preface, "The historical crisis that human society is facing at this time is extraordinary and also unique. Not only the human society is in its grip, it is also nature and the environment. If they are destroyed the existence of human society will be impossible...". How far-sighted this identification of the crisis was, can be understood more easily today.



At a time when it is being loudly propagated that there is no alternative to globalization, privatization, and liberalization, Manager Pandey rightly points out that "the tendency of universalism and globalization is nothing new to capitalism". He writes on Marx and Rosa Luxemburg's evidence. "Rosa Luxemburg said long ago that capitalism can survive only in the non-capitalist world by continuing to expand, so its chances of survival when it ceases to expand will also come to an end. Doesn't this show that capitalism is also heading towards a terrible crisis? Will the end of the process of globalization mark the beginning of the end of capitalism?" It is quite possible.

Just as the mainstream of India's Left movement after India's independence transformed into "Official Marxism", its intellectuals were also charmed by Nehru's so-called socialism. It was not limited to drawing inspiration from the Soviet Revolution but to taking directions from USSR. Despite the suppression of revolutionary peasant struggles in Telangana, Nehru miraculously became the leader of both the capitalists and the leftists of the country. A radical group of left activists and intellectuals could never agree to all this. In the 1970s, radical left activists, students, and intellectuals had also adopted a fairly critical attitude towards Soviet Russia. Manager Pandey has written in the preface of 'Despite the crisis'- "One of the ironies of Russian socialism was that the rulers and intellectuals there and their foreign supporters also rejected any criticism of the Communist Party of Russia, its power and the system of Russian society. Instead of listening carefully and understanding, they used to dismiss it as part of the campaign of condemnation of Socialism and Marxism." The late 1960s and the early 1970s, in which Manger Pandey's critique took direction and energy, were decades of revolutionary mass upsurges on a global scale. The heat of the liberation struggles of the colonies had not yet subsided. A small country like Vietnam made the superpower of the world retreat from the battlefields. This period was such when there was a tide of anti-imperialist movements of the people in all the countries of Asia, Africa, and South America. In India, the peasant uprising of Naxalbari (1967) started a new chapter in the left movement of India. Students from Europe and America were on the streets in support of Vietnam and against the war imposed by America. The liberation struggle of Palestine had begun. The heroes of this era were Ho-Chi-Minh, Patrice Lumumba, Fidel Castro, Ernesto-Che-Guevara, and Charu Mazumdar. The left movement of India was going through a sharp internal struggle. If there was resistance, repression was also unprecedented. Banaras was the center of the intellectual movements of this period. During these days, Manager Pandey, who was pursuing higher education in Banaras, became an active participant in these movements. Manager Pandey's critical struggles cannot be understood properly if the ideological atmosphere of those days is not taken into account. Liberation pays its tribute to Professor Manager Pandey. ■

COMRADE LAXMI PASWAN

CPIML lost Comrade Laxmi Paswan, 70, a pillar of the Party in Darbhanga and the entire Mithila region for the last five decades. He passed away on 4 November at a private hospital in Samastipur. Beginning as a student activist in the 1974 movement, he spearheaded the battle for the dignity and rights of the oppressed people braving feudal violence and state repression including years of imprisonment and conviction in a false case. Comrade Laxmi Paswan was Bihar state vice president of AIARLA. A popular leader of the masses in Darbhanga, he had been jailed many times, spent more than five years in jails and faced feudal-kulak violence. He joined politics through Socialist party but in the course of time got disillusioned with it and joined PCC which was then led by comrade Umadhar Singh. Many valiant land struggles under his leadership were fought and won during those days and people living on those lands remember him with much admiration. During the decade of 80s he joined CPIML Liberation and since then played an important role in establishing and expanding the party in the Mithila region.



His passing is a great loss for the organisation in Darbhanga as well as for the rural toiling masses among whom he was extremely popular. He had to always face the ire of criminal feudal nexus who succeeded in preventing him from contesting elections by falsely implicating him and a dozen other activists in a case of murder, but they couldn't succeed in stopping him from fighting the struggles of poor and oppressed despite so many jail terms. He will always be remembered by the younger comrades as a stout fighter and committed leader. He is also remembered for inducting the largest number of members into the AIARLA, which eventually gave a great strength to our work among rural workers. Thousands of people paid him tribute before his last journey was taken out from the CPIML Darbhanga office. A huge procession accompanied him along with CPIML Politburo member Dharendra Jha, MLA Rambali Yadav, AIARLA Bihar president Upendra Paswan and others to the cremation ground in his village Dilahi. Ex-Minister of state for Education in Bihar Ashraf Fatmi, Prof. Surendra Pd. Suman, JDU leader Rampravesh Paswan, Congress leader Prof. Dayanand Paswan, CPI district secretary Narayanji Jha, CPIM dist. Secretary Avinash Chandra Thakur, SUCI leader K Mujahid, Bhim Army's Bhola Paswan, many elected representatives of Zilla Panchayat and Block panchayats, students of Darbhanga Welfare Hostel, a large number of prominent citizens participated in his last journey.

Comrade Laxmi Paswan had added many new chapters in the revolutionary struggles of dalits and poor in the region. He led many struggles through which hundreds of dalits succeeded in winning their rights over the land. His legacy will continue to guide and inspire us in the battle against communal fascist forces across Mithila and Bihar.

Red Salute to Comrade Laxmi Paswan! ■

COMRADE YUGAL KISHORE SHARMA

Comrade Yugal Kishore Sharma, 74, passed away on 20 November 2022 at his home in Khijarsarai in Gaya district. He was a dedicated leader of the party. He had suffered a stroke of paralysis last December and was recovering gradually, but a second stroke on 18 November proved fatal for him. He was born on 7 July 1948. A very talented student he got admitted to the Bihar Engineering College, but had to leave his pursuit and later was graduated from Gaya College with Economics major in 1971. He was active in political movements since his college days and was the district secretary of AISF in Gaya.



CPI national leadership sent him in 1971 to Soviet Union for studies in Marxism. He returned after one year to join party activities and contributed remarkably as a teacher of Marxism. He became disillusioned with the CPI during Emergency days because of pro-Congress policies of the former and joined CPI(M). During 1980s he worked in CPI(M) on many fronts and gained popularity as a youth leader. He got disillusioned with CPI(M) in 1990 and left it. He started teaching mathematics to students and there too he was a very popular teacher. After dissociating himself from the CPI(M) he continued to take part in various social-political activities. His consistent campaign for installing a statue of Bhagat Singh in Khijarsarai in 2004 was successful. By that time he came into contact with the CPIML and became a member. Since then he has always been actively involved in various party activities and became party district committee member in Gaya. He attended two party Congresses held in Kolkata and Mansa. He was a member of party's Bihar state education department.

Comrade Yugal Kishore Sharma always remained committed to communist principles and stood firmly against every injustice and oppression. He paid a heavy price for this and was rendered homeless many times but his spirit could never be dampened in face of such repressions. His death is a great loss for the communist movement and the party.

Red Salute Comrade Yugal Kishore Sharma! ■

COMRADE RAJPAL

A long time member of CPIML in Delhi Comrade Rajpal suddenly succumbed to a brief spell of illness resulting from a cardiac stroke on 30 October. He was a member for more than three and a half decades and contributed immensely in building the party and the DTC Workers' Unity Centre, one of the first transport workers' unions in the national capital, during the decade of 1980s. He was still an employee of the Delhi Transport Corporation and was due to retire only next year. His passing is a great loss for the comrades in Delhi who fondly remember him as a very affectionate and militant comrade.



Red Salute Comrade Rajpal! ■

ALL INDIA SCHEME WORKERS PROTEST IN DELHI



On 21 November 2022, more than 2000 scheme workers from across the country, who are backbone of India's social welfare schemes, including mid-day meal and community health services gathered at Delhi's Jantar Mantar in protest against Modi government's attempts to trample their rights. India's Scheme workers, viz. ASHA, Mid-day Meal, Anganwadi, and other workers, continue to suffer from remarkably low salary, precarity of employment, and lack of dignity. They are demanding their labour rights, proper wages, rights and dignity.

The protest was organised by All India Scheme Workers' Federation [affiliated to All-India Central Council of Trade Unions (AICCTU)], which has launched a nationwide campaign to ensure justice and dignity for Scheme Workers, and to demand their rights.

The following demands have been outlined at the demonstration:

- Give scheme workers (ASHA, mid-day meal, Anganwadi, etc.) the status of government employees!
- Fix a monthly salary of Rs 28,000 for scheme workers at the national level! Guarantee proper social security including pension!
- Fix working hours for scheme workers! Form a gender cell to prevent sexual harassment at the workplace!
- Stop privatization / NGO-ization of these public utility government schemes (NHM, mid-day meal, ICDS, etc.)
- Provide proper compensation to the families of the scheme workers killed during the Corona period!

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